

CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMITTEE AGENDA REPORT

SUBJECT: 1405 GARDEN STREET (ARCH-0568-2024) REVIEW OF A MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT IN THE OLD TOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT

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RECOMMENDATION

Provide a recommendation to the Community Development Director as to the consistency of the proposed project with the Historic Preservation Ordinance and applicable historic preservation policies, standards, and guidelines

1.0 BACKGROUND

The applicant proposes to construct an addition to an existing commercial building in the Old Town Historic District, to create a three-story mixed-use project comprised of two residential dwellings on the upper floors, over ground-level commercial offices (see Project Plans, Attachment A). As provided by §§ 14.01.030(B)(7) & (C)(4) of the City's Historic Preservation Ordinance, the project is being referred to the Cultural Heritage Committee (CHC) for its recommendation to the Community Development Director as to its consistency with historical preservation policies for alterations and additions involving properties within historic districts.



Figure 1: 1405 Garden St.

2.0 DISCUSSION

Site and Setting

The subject property is a commercial parcel at the southwest corner of Garden and Pismo Streets (Figure 1), within the Old Town Historic District, one of the City's oldest residential neighborhoods, built up historically around the turn of the 20th Century, with older structures dating back to the 1880s (see District description, Attachment B).

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Figure 2: 1405 Garden: Garden St. frontage (left); Pismo St. frontage (right)

The site is situated within an Office (O) Zone that extends along Pacific and Pismo Streets, along the northern edge of the District. It is one of only seven parcels of this Office Zone that extend into the District and, apart from two small Neighborhood Commercial Zones¹, these are the only parcels in the District located in a non-residential zone. It is developed with a single-story commercial office building, constructed in 1948.

In the listing of historic properties established in 1988, with adoption of Resolution 6424 by the City Council, the property was classified as a “Non-Contributing Property”² and has not been subsequently reclassified. Within the immediate vicinity of the subject site (the Pismo and Garden Street frontages adjacent to the site) are seven listed historic resources: the Master-List Old Fire Station Building (750 Pismo), D.M. and Carrie Proper Meredith House (1421 Garden), and Stanton House (752 Buchon); and four Contributing-List residences (729 Pismo, 777 Pismo, 1425 Garden, and 770 Buchon).



Figure 3: Proposed building, as remodeled; Garden St. frontage (left), Pismo St. frontage (right)

¹ Within the Old Town Historic District are two Neighborhood Commercial Zones, encompassing the Sidewalk Market and Deli at 1401 Osos Street, and Gus’s Deli at 1638 Osos Street.

² Non-Contributing Property is described in the 1988 listing of historical properties as “a structure that does not contribute to the historic character of the area.”

3.0 EVALUATION

Historical Preservation Program Guidelines

<p>§ 3.1.1 Conformance with design standards</p>	<p>The proposed project will conform with the goals and policies of the General Plan, the Historic Preservation Ordinance, these Guidelines, the Community Design Guidelines, any applicable specific or area plan, and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.</p>
<p>§ 3.2.1 Architectural Compatibility – within Historic Districts</p>	<p>The proposed project can found architecturally compatible with the prevailing historic character of the Old Town Historic District, as measured by its consistency with the scale, massing, rhythm, siting and street yard setbacks of the district's historic structures. However, as a non-contributing element in the District, it does not attempt to incorporate architectural elements of the District's historic structure, copy or imitate historic structures, or seek to create the illusion that it is historic.</p>
<p>§ 3.2.2 Architectural Compatibility</p>	<p>The proposed project will not sharply contrast with, significantly block public views of, or visually detract from, the historic architectural character of historically designated structures adjacent to the site, or to detract from the prevailing historic architectural character of the Old Town Historic district.</p>

Siting and setbacks. Current development standards for the Office and adjacent Medium-Density Residential (R-2) Zones establish front and street side setbacks ranging from ten to twenty feet. Much of the development in the vicinity, including construction of the subject building, pre-dates the City's adoption of setback standards³ and exhibits a variety of nonconforming street setbacks, including the nearby historical resources identified above.

Scale, massing, rhythm. Guidelines note that two-story, and rarely three-story, houses predominate in the District (see Attachment B, pg. 35). Current development standards limit building height in the Office and Medium Density Residential Zones to 35 feet, and impose increasing upper-level setback requirements, to define the appropriate scale for development within these zones. At 35 feet in height, and designed to step back at the new upper levels to conform to setback standards, the proposed project maximizes the site's development potential and thus exhibits a marginally larger scale than the nearby one- and two-story historical dwellings in the vicinity. The Stanton House, at Buchon and

³ The City of San Luis Obispo first adopted its Zoning Regulations in 1947



Figure 4: Stanton House (752 Buchon)

Garden, on the “top of the hill” is among the largest of nearby buildings, in scale. Garden Street slopes downward from Buchon toward Pismo Street, and a significant additional upper-level setback is provided at the southern portion of the proposed building (adjacent to 1421 Garden), which together serve to mitigate the perceived mass and scale of the remodeled building.

Insofar as the existing building is nonconforming in street setback in a manner similar to other buildings in the vicinity, and that the proposed addition is designed to conform to current standards for building height and upper-level building setbacks, and provides significant additional setback from adjacent property on Garden Street, the proposed project can be seen to be consistent with the scale, massing, and rhythm exhibited by buildings in the vicinity of this location.

Architectural Characteristics. As discussed above and in the Historical Preservation Program Guidelines (see Attachment B, page 36), the Old Town Historic District is predominantly a residential neighborhood, characterized by examples of High Victorian architecture (including variations such as Queen Anne, Italianate, Stick and Gothic Revival influences), especially along the “top of the hill” roughly aligned with Buchon Street, and other, more modest structures with simpler styles (Neo-classic Row House, Folk Victorian, and Craftsman Bungalow). Predominant architectural features include:

- Two- and rarely three-story houses
- Gable and hip roof types
- Highly ornamented roof features, prominent fascias, bargeboards, gable end treatments, decorative shingles, prominent pediments or cornices
- Traditional fenestration, e.g., double-hung, wood sash windows, divided light windows, ornamental front doors, wood screen doors
- Painted wood surface material, including siding and decorative moldings

Non-Contributing Elements. Guidelines note that most of the contemporary buildings in the District are “non-contributing buildings” that do not exhibit the characteristics of the District’s listed resources and have not achieved historical significance. With its stucco siding, flat roof, rectilinear shape, and horizontal massing, the subject building falls within this category. Given these circumstances, it is clear that with expansion of the building, it cannot be expected that the architectural characteristics of the Victorian, Bungalow, and other residential architectural styles found within the District would be incorporated into the project design. It is also noted that Guidelines provide: “New structures are not required to copy or imitate historic structures, or seek to create the illusion that a new building is historic” (HPPG §3.2.1).

Community Design Guidelines

<p>§ 3.1 (B) Architectural style</p>	<p>The proposed project can be found compatible with the existing built environment and to preserve the historic flavor of the community and its scale and ambience.</p>
<p>§ 3.1 (B.2) Neighborhood compatibility</p>	<p>Although the proposed project does not duplicate the character of surrounding buildings, it can be found to be complementary to its surroundings, through employment of an appropriate design theme; proportional building scale and size; appropriate building setbacks and massing; and appropriate colors, textures, and building materials.</p>
<p>§ 3.1 (B.4) Form and mass</p>	<p>The proposed project employs wall articulation expressed through wall offsets, recessed windows and entries, and second floor setbacks.</p>
<p>§ 3.1 (B.5) Rooflines</p>	<p>The project design is amenable to a flat roof form and is otherwise consistent with the objectives of these guidelines.</p>
<p>§ 3.1 (B.9) Additions to existing structures</p>	<p>The design of the proposed addition increases the scale and massing of the existing building but employs proportion and detailing appropriate to the original structure. The design repeats the extensive window area of the building’s bay and picture windows, its flat roof design, and incorporates column and masonry accent details echoing the building’s original minimalistic decorative details.</p>

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As discussed in the section above, the proposed project builds on the modern form, style and minimal detailing of the original structure, rather than attempting to incorporate characteristic elements of early 20th Century residential buildings in the vicinity or to mimic their architectural styles. Nevertheless, the building respects, and is compatible with, the style and scale of those buildings. As described by the project architect in the application Design Summary (see Attachment C), “The proposed building design is rooted in the existing building's mid-century modern features which include rounded exterior corners and strong horizontal rooflines. The intent is to complement the original building design, while not disguising the new construction as part of the original building.”

The project design provides a sense of human scale and proportion by carefully considered wall articulation, through the use of ground-floor roof overhang, repetition of thin support columns, contrasting block wall accents, significant upper-level building setbacks, wall offsets, recessed deck areas and entries, and expansive window area. The building’s modernistic design is amenable to a flat roof, and its cornice trim and rounding are among the elements that enhance a sense of quality in design. The resulting form, style, and appearance can be found to be consistent with guidance provided in Community Design Guidelines for commercial project design (§ 3.1).

Secretary of the Interior’s Standards (Rehabilitation)

Setting – Alterations and Additions for a New Use	
<i>Recommended</i>	<i>Not Recommended</i>
Designing adjacent new construction that is compatible with the historic character of the setting.	Introducing new construction into historic districts which is visually incompatible or that destroys historic relationships within the setting.

Although neither the subject property nor the building on it have been designated as a historic resource, they are located within a historic district. As such, guidance regarding the relationship between new construction and the historical character of a historic district is useful. The building, both as it exists and as proposed to be remodeled, is recognized as a noncontributing element to the Old Town Historic District and thus it does not directly incorporate the District’s signature characteristics or mimic its characteristic architectural styles. It nonetheless has been designed to be consistent with the siting, scale, and massing of historic resources in the vicinity, while also achieving visual compatibility with the District’s character by employing forms, detailing, and design elements appropriate to the building’s modern style.

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Summary

The applicant has designed an addition to the existing building on this property in a manner that respects and is compatible with the siting, scale, massing, and architectural elements of historical resources in the Old Town Historic District. Based on the evaluation provided in this report, staff suggests that the Committee provide a positive recommendation to the Community Development Director regarding consistency of the project with the Historical Preservation Ordinance and with applicable historical preservation policies, standards, and 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 Office land use designation and applicable policies described in the City's General Plan, consistent with standards and limitations described in Zoning Regulations for the Office (O) 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. Recommend that the Community Development Director find the project consistent with the City's Historical Preservation Ordinance and with applicable historical preservation policies, standards, and guidelines (this is the action recommended by staff, based on the evaluation provided above);
2. Continue review to another date with direction to staff and applicant; or
3. Recommend that the Community Development Director deny the application, based on specific findings describing inconsistency with historical preservation policies, standards, and guidelines.

6.0 ATTACHMENTS

- A - Project Plans (ARCH-0568-2024)
- B - Old Town Historic District (Historic Preservation Program Guidelines)
- C - Design Summary (TEN OVER STUDIO)