



City of Santa Barbara

PLANNING COMMISSION

MINUTES

SEPTEMBER 15, 2022

1:00 P.M.
City Hall, Council Chambers
735 Anacapa Street; and
1026 Via Los Padres
Santa Barbara 93111

COMMISSION MEMBERS:

Gabriel Escobedo, Chair
Roxana Bonderson, Vice Chair
John M. Baucke
Jay D. Higgins
Sheila Lodge
Devon Wardlow
Lesley Wiscomb

STAFF:

Tava Ostrenger, Assistant City Attorney
Allison DeBusk, Senior Planner
Gillian Fennessy, Commission Secretary

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Escobedo called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

I. ROLL CALL

Chair Gabriel Escobedo, Vice Chair Roxana Bonderson, Commissioners John M. Baucke, Jay D. Higgins (until 3:58), Sheila Lodge, Devon Wardlow, and Lesley Wiscomb

STAFF PRESENT

Tava Ostrenger, Assistant City Attorney
Allison DeBusk, Senior Planner
Megan Arciniega, Project Planner
Tony Ruggieri, City TV Production Supervisor
Gillian Fennessy, Commission Secretary

II. PRELIMINARY MATTERS

A. Requests for continuances, withdrawals, postponements, or addition of ex-agenda items:

No requests.

B. Announcements and appeals:

No announcements.

C. Review, consideration, and action on the following draft Planning Commission minutes and resolutions:

1. August 11, 2022 Planning Commission Minutes

2. Planning Commission Resolution No. 006-22
601 Santa Barbara Street

MOTION: Wiscomb / Lodge

Approve the minutes and resolutions as presented.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Ayes: 5 Noes: 0 Abstain: 2 (Higgins and Wardlow) Absent: 0

- D. Comments from members of the public pertaining to items not on this agenda:

Public comment opened at 1:02 p.m., and as no one wished to speak, it closed.

Written correspondence from Kathleen Dagg was acknowledged.

III. NEW ITEM – CONCEPT REVIEW

ACTUAL TIME: 1:03 P.M.

425 GARDEN STREET

Assessor's Parcel Number: 031-272-006

Zoning Designation: M-C (Manufacturing Commercial)

Application Number: PLN2021-00523

Applicant / Owner: Greg Reitz, Rethink Development / 425 Garden LLC

The 16,415-square-foot site is currently developed with three one-story buildings totaling approximately 6,527 square feet, which would be demolished in order to construct a new 36-unit residential development. The proposed project involves construction of a new four-story residential building with a bike room, trash room, lobby, and amenity space. The project proposes 30 market-rate units, 2 moderate-income units, and 4 very-low-income units. No parking is proposed, though there would be a loading area for two service vehicles. The residential unit mix would include 1 one-bedroom unit, 21 two-bedroom units and 14 three-bedroom units, with an average size of 811 square feet. The project proposes to use the City's Average Unit-Size Density Incentive (AUD) Program and state Density Bonus Law.

The project is being presented to the Planning Commission for AUD concept review and comments only pursuant to SBMC §30.150.060; no decisions will be made at this meeting. The ABR would be the formal decision-maker for the project.

Megan Arciniega, Project Planner, gave the Staff presentation.

Greg Reitz, Rethink Development, gave the Applicant presentation.

Public comment opened at 1:26 p.m., and the following individual spoke:

1. Christine Feldman

Public comment closed at 1:29 p.m.

Written correspondence from Barry Winick was acknowledged.

Commissioner comments:

Commissioner Baucke:

- The courtyard is very important because it is the only refuge space for the tenants.
- The courtyard should be designed to be as useable for the tenants as possible and in a manner in which it is a sanctuary. The noise impacts from Garden Street need to be mitigated and one of the ways to do that is to not open it up as it is proposed.
- Has concerns about the street cross section because it is a very impacted area with a lot of traffic.
- The pull-outs that are proposed are an improvement and will work for the property, but there are several issues that are concerning, including the 6-foot sidewalk.
- The 6-foot sidewalk is inadequate for this urbanistic project. A preferred minimum would be 8 feet.
- Suggests that ABR consider incorporating an arcade or gallery format to this project and have 10-foot clear passageway which would provide a wide enough sidewalk.
- The project seems a tad too massive.
- Small increments of change could make a big difference for this project.
- Supports the project overall and believes that it is the right project at right location, but there are details that need to be worked out.
- Appreciates the LEED aspects of the project.
- Biggest concern is the AUD program, because this project only provides two moderate income units.
- Questions why won't the City do what the State Density Bonus allows in which we would get more deed restricted units at the levels this community needs.
- Since this project is located near an entry into the City, the south corner of the building is important and might need some more articulation.
- Agrees with ABR's comments of breaking the building down into bite-sized pieces and elements.
- Believes that the project at 701 Milpas Street missed the activation of the street and the key for this project is to focus on the activation of the street and the courtyard serves as an added element of good design of Santa Barbara scale.

Commissioner Wiscomb:

- The site is currently an eyesore, so improvements are appreciated and especially with housing.
- The sustainability aspects of the project are admirable.
- There are 85 bedrooms and no parking, so it is unrealistic to provide 40 bike parking spaces (one bike space per unit plus an extra four) when we have mostly two-bedroom units.
- Bike parking needs to be at least doubled.
- Neighborhood compatibility for this project has been an issue and remains an issue.
- Unfortunate that the Commission wasn't provided with the landscape plan before the meeting because the public pedestrian aspects of the project are greatly lacking.

- Agrees with one of the ABR members that stated that the streetscape shows a lack of development.
- Agrees with public commenter at the ABR meeting, Fred Sweeney, that street activation doesn't match the design proposed.
- The street activation and the public landscape, including the sidewalk, should be developed to the satisfaction of the ABR prior to the project design approval.
- Walking out of or walking by the building must be a pleasant experience.
- Understands Commissioner Baucke's comments about closing off the courtyard, but believes it is important that it be open to the street, so we don't have an alleyway approach on Garden Street.
- At least being able to visually look into the courtyard helps activate the pedestrian experience on the street.
- Believes that the scale of this project is not appropriate for the neighborhood.
- There needs to be more work done to balance the scale and the aesthetics with the neighborhood for it to become a sensitive development to the community.
- In reference to Land Use Element LG15 Sustainable Neighborhood Planning, doesn't see the sense of place here yet and believes the scale is too big for this area.
- Believes that this could be a great development with some changes including losing some bedrooms and putting in more landscaping.
- There needs to be more work done for the project to meet the General Plan Elements that Staff has identified for consistency, including ER11, ER30 and Circulation 5.7.1.
- The project should convey visual excitement, pedestrian comfort, and should speak to the qualities of Santa Barbara in the landscape.
- Would like to see ABR work on the project further to develop a streetscape that not only softens the scale of the buildings, but to show that the project is worthy of a place in Santa Barbara.

Commissioner Wardlow:

- Supports the project and believes that it is aligned with the General Plan and the direction in which the City is moving in terms of developing more housing.
- Has concerns about the parking but looks forward to seeing this project come to fruition and having a report or study from Staff on how bike use versus car ownership is working.
- Appreciates the applicant's work to create a bike friendly environment.
- Respectfully disagrees with Commissioners Baucke and Wiscomb on their comments about scale.
- Believes that this is an appropriate scale because as the City moves forward with developing more housing this is some of the necessary changes that are going to be made in our community.
- This area of Garden Street is directly poised for this type of development, currently it is underutilized.
- This is a perfect location to have more dense housing and more folks being able to utilize multiple bedrooms so that it can be somewhat affordable for people looking to rent in Santa Barbara.
- Values the perspective that we can have a breakup between the two buildings for the passersby in the community because it helps with the scalability issue.
- The specific architectural elements are aligned with a lot of the architecture in Santa Barbara.

- Echoes Commissioner Baucke's comments that this is one step forward on affordable housing but would like to see more affordable units in these types of developments.

Commissioner Lodge:

- Agrees with Commissioners Baucke and Wiscomb.
- Agrees with the ABR comments.
- This building is out of scale with the neighborhood, especially with the projection of the second through fourth floors, and it is going to loom over the street.
- Agrees with Commissioner Wiscomb's comment that the project doesn't say Santa Barbara, especially as an entrance to the City.
- It is an appropriate site for this kind of development as an infill site and as residential.
- The City needs the housing but not at any cost to the community.
- This is a project that is not going to add to Santa Barbara.
- 425 Santa Barbara Street is a similar project with no parking requirement that is more successful than this project and suggests the applicant take a look at it.

Commissioner Higgins:

- Must think about and balance what is most important to the community right now and can handle congestion and parking if it is going to result in a project that has lower rents.
- If the applicant were to make some changes to the project, it might advance this toward something that is more balanced.
- A bike plan is necessary to see because the project is relying heavily on bikes.
- Would like to see a circulation plan that includes how people get on and off of their bikes at the front of the building.
- Would like to see lots of signage or striping on how to get from point A to point B without creating a hazard.
- Appreciates the applicant trying to balance the project in terms of no parking with the potential for parking.
- Would like to discourage people from having cars.
- No cars here is what is at stake for the nearby intersection and congestion, so he wouldn't want to see any off-site parking because, while convenient, it will drive rents up and what the community needs is something without high rent and deed restriction.
- Would like to see the parking pocket increased and would sacrifice trees because there will be more people coming out of the property.
- Encourages the applicant to meet with Ms. Feldman and other neighboring property owners to discuss concerns.

Commissioner Bonderson:

- Appreciates the project and the introduction of the low- and moderate-income housing proposed.
- The project is aligned with the General Plan and the direction the City is currently going to meet the housing requirements and the needs of the community.
- There are opportunities to improve the design to make it better, especially in relation to the street, and take advantage of the architectural elements familiar in Santa Barbara.
- Concerned about causing limitations for a project like this.
- Would like to incorporate improvements to the street façade and to do so in a way that this project can be realized.

- Doesn't have an issue with the introduction of a project of this scale on Garden Street, especially when it is adjacent to the height of the Office Max building.
- Would like to see the entire length of the front area be developed into a pull-out to allow for drop off and pick up opportunities with time limits to also support the safe backing up of the on-site maintenance parking area.
- If the applicant moves forward with her suggestion, they should consider replacing landscaping in the courtyard or on the front of the site.
- The applicant should explore relocating the monitoring wells so the front parking pull-out area can be expanded.
- An expanded pull-out area would serve the street and the neighborhood in case of an emergency, which would provide relief to neighbors.
- Would like to discourage parking but understands that it is not always realistic.
- Believes that tenants shouldn't be forbidden to own cars because it forces the project to exclude individuals who require a car for a short or long term.
- Wants to ensure that this project is sensitive to the handicapped, the elderly, and families that may have the need for a vehicle for a period.
- The pull-out area will also be important for Ubers, deliveries, and drop-offs.
- Extending the length of the pull-out space will be an exceptional opportunity to make the façade better and relieve the street from congestion.
- Bike parking should be increased, closer to 70 or 80 spaces.
- Would like the applicant to consider the introduction of more architectural elements and textures to make the courtyard and façade more of a Santa Barbara style.
- The applicant should study the opportunity to expand balconies because private outdoor space is valuable in a multi-unit housing project.
- Agrees that the street should be developed further in terms of the pedestrian activation.
- Although pedestrian activation is not required by code, believes that it should be done in a way to create an opportunity to make the neighborhood better and to allow it to be ready for when pedestrian and bicycle master plans get updated or implemented in the future.
- She is comfortable with the scale and number of units.
- The housing and sustainability aspects of this project have been well thought out and are moving in the right direction, but there is always room for improvement.

Chair Escobedo:

- Supports the project.
- Appreciates the idea of breaking up the size of the building as proposed.
- The courtyard plays a big role in breaking up the size of the building.
- Focusing on the pedestrian experience will make this project fit in the neighborhood.
- Doesn't think that there needs to be wholesale changes made to this project to fit the Santa Barbara context.
- Because the project abuts the Office Max building, the height and size makes sense.
- The site is currently underutilized and an eyesore.
- Appreciates that there are two- and three-bedroom units included in this project as it allows for people to have roommates and for families to have an opportunity to live there as well.
- Commends the applicant for anticipating the concerns about not having parking and coming up with solutions proactively.
- Agrees with Commissioner Wiscomb's comments about the bike parking.
- Would like to increase the bike parking to the expected need.

- The ground parking spaces for the electric bikes is a good idea not only for the heavier bikes, but for folks who don't have the strength to maneuver the bikes into the racks.
- Dedicated bike parking spaces for the units is important when you have as few as 40 bike parking spaces, but if the applicant incorporates more bike parking then a first come first served approach makes sense.
- Agrees with Commissioner Higgins that it would be much more compelling if the applicant could demonstrate what the circulation would be in terms of the bike circulation and emergency vehicles.
- In favor of extending the parking turn-out, maybe not the full length, even if it means removing one tree.
- Extending the turn-out onto the neighboring properties is worth looking into.
- We never anticipate using emergency services, but we need to know if it is adequate to meet the need.
- Hopeful that these units will be cheaper but is skeptical.
- This project is going to be one of two projects with no parking, and it is a big opportunity for this location, and hopes that when this plays out that it will be cheaper.
- This area is walkable and bikeable.
- Looks forward to the day we update our multi-unit housing policy to address the affordable housing needs.
- Has hope in the new Housing Element and thinks there will be a lot of opportunity there.

MOTION: Higgins / Baucke

The Commission agrees that the project meets the intent of the General Plan and looks forward to the Architectural Board of Review (ABR) working with the applicant on the following: redesigning the courtyard to be more of a refuge for tenants, architectural detailing on exterior of building to have a more Santa Barbara articulation, expanding parking pockets for temporary parking and emergency services, enhancing and improving the pedestrian and bike experience with signage and off-site direction.

AMENDED MOTION: Higgins / Baucke

The Commission agrees that the project meets the intent of the General Plan and looks forward to the Architectural Board of Review (ABR) working with the applicant on the following: redesigning the courtyard ~~to be more of a refuge~~ *with additional sound mitigation* for tenants, and architectural detailing on exterior of building to have a more Santa Barbara articulation ~~pockets be expanded for temporary parking and emergency services, the pedestrian and bike experience be enhanced and improved with signage and off-site direction.~~

The motion was substituted.

SUBSTITUTE MOTION: Wiscomb / Wardlow

The Commission supports the project, and it meets the General Plan, particularly the Housing Element. There should be an increase in bike parking; improvements to design to make it aesthetically pleasing for pedestrians; an increase to sound attenuation at the courtyard, if possible, for the benefit of tenants without eliminating the pedestrian visibility of the courtyard from the street; and an increase pull outs, if possible, to accommodate more vehicles while ensuring that there is appropriate landscaping and street trees for the pedestrian experience.

This motion carried by the following vote:

Ayes: 7 Noes: 0 Abstain: 0 Absent: 0

IV. ADMINISTRATIVE AGENDA**ACTUAL TIME: 3:55 P.M.****A. Committee and Liaison Reports:****1. Staff Hearing Officer Liaison Report**

Commissioner Higgins reported on several of the Staff Hearing Officer meetings.

2. Other Committee and Liaison Reports

- a. Commissioner Lodge reported on the September 14, 2022 meeting of the Historic Landmarks Commission.
- b. Commissioner Bonderson reported on the July 25, August 1, August 8, and August 22, 2022 meetings of the Architectural Board of Review.
- c. Commissioner Bonderson announced that the State Street Advisory Committee meeting for September 19, 2022 has been cancelled.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Escobedo adjourned the meeting at 4:05 p.m.

Submitted by,



Gillian Fennessy, Commission Secretary