



City of Santa Barbara

PLANNING COMMISSION

MINUTES

AUGUST 17, 2023

1:00 P.M.
City Hall, Council Chambers
735 Anacapa Street
SantaBarbaraCA.gov

COMMISSION MEMBERS:

Roxana Bonderson, Chair
John M. Baucke, Vice Chair
Lucille Boss
Donald DeLuccio
Sheila Lodge
Devon Wardlow
Lesley Wiscomb

STAFF:

Tava Ostrenger, Assistant City Attorney
Allison DeBusk, City Planner
Kira Esparza, Administrative Assistant

CALL TO ORDER

Vice Chair Baucke called the meeting to order at 1:01 p.m.

I. ROLL CALL

Vice Chair John M. Baucke, Commissioners Lucille Boss, Donald DeLuccio, Sheila Lodge, Devon Wardlow, and Lesley Wiscomb

Absent: Chair Roxana Bonderson

STAFF PRESENT

Tava Ostrenger, Assistant City Attorney
Allison DeBusk, City Planner
Chris Bell, City TV Production Supervisor
Janet Ahern, City TV Production Specialist
Kelly Brodison, Associate Planner
Kira Esparza, Administrative Assistant

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 3, 2023 Planning Commission Minutes

MOTION: DeLuccio / Wiscomb

Approve the minutes as presented.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Ayes: 5 Noes: 0 Abstain: 1 (Wardlow) Absent: 1 (Bonderson)

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

Public comment opened at 1:04 p.m., and as no one wished to speak, it closed.

III. NEW ITEM

ACTUAL TIME: 1:05 P.M.

710 – 720 STATE STREET AND 15 E. ORTEGA STREET

Assessor's Parcel Number: 037-092-013, 019, 020, 021, 034 and 014

Zoning Designation: C-G (Commercial General)

Application Number: PLN2022-00325

Owner: 710 State St Partners L.P.,
Adam Geeb, Managing Member

Applicant: Kevin Moore

The project consists of a proposal to construct a 32,799-square-foot, four-story, 66-room hotel including a restaurant/bar on six lots totaling 30,004 square feet. The project also includes 14 parking spaces on the ground floor. The ground floor would contain a 1,364-square-foot restaurant open to the public, a 1,900-square-foot lobby, and guest use conference rooms.

A Lot Merger is required for the properties at 710-720 State Street and 15 E. Ortega Street as part of the project. The 14,455-square-foot buildings at 710 State Street (including 19 E. Ortega) and the 1,000-square-foot building at 15 E. Ortega are proposed to be demolished. The remaining 6,071 square feet of existing nonresidential development will remain (714-720 State Street).

The discretionary applications under the jurisdiction of the Planning Commission at this hearing are:

- A. A Development Plan to allow the construction of 17,344 square feet of net new nonresidential development (Santa Barbara Municipal Code (SBMC) Chapter 30.230); and
- B. Determination that the project is categorically exempt from further environmental review pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines Section 15332 [Infill Development Projects].

Kelly Brodison, Assistant Planner, gave the Staff presentation.

Kevin Moore, Kevin Moore Architect, gave the Applicant presentation, and was joined by Courtney Jane Miller, CJM LA, and Adam Geeb, SIMA Management.

Public comment opened at 1:31 p.m., and the following individuals spoke:

1. Cassandra Ensberg and Keith Butler, Commissioners from Historic Landmarks Commission
2. Garreth Kelly
3. Michael Crenshaw
4. Pedro Toscano
5. Nicole Miller
6. Peter Latta
7. George Drake Kight
8. Eoghan Dillion
9. Darrel Jackson
10. James Dudley
11. Darcy Roberts
12. Amir N
13. Peter Latta

Written correspondence from Brooke Armstrong, John O'Neill, and Steve Johnson was acknowledged.

Public comment closed at 2:05 p.m.

Commissioner comments:

Commissioner Wiscomb:

- Thanks to Commissioners Butler and Ensberg for coming and representing the Historic Landmarks Commission.
- There is not a single Planning Commissioner who wouldn't prefer a housing project here. However, this wouldn't be an affordable housing project as this is a very expensive part of the City and there is not a private/public partnership like the 400 W Carrillo project.
- The project would have been allowed to proceed as a hotel, regardless of a hotel moratorium. If City Council had passed the hotel moratorium as drafted, this project would have still been allowed because it was already in the process.
- Swayed by the fact that we do not need another very large empty space in the downtown area, and that needs serious consideration for the downtown area and is impactful when we're recovering from Covid and trying to bring people downtown and get spaces leased.
- The Commission has encouraged adaptive reuse projects, and this is a good example of an adaptive reuse project. The fact that we have existing businesses that are there and will remain there, and historical buildings that will remain there is key.
- If the project is going to be a hotel rather than housing, then this is an ideal location. As stated in the applicant letter, it is flanked by commercial and retail, De La Guerra Plaza and the News Press Building, and this is a good location.
- The numbers provided by staff show that there are limited number of hotel units in the Downtown area, and that helps justify the location.

- Downtown is a major tourist draw, with historic sites, stores, art venues, and restaurants. A lot of tourists like to stay downtown, and that is important.
- Land Use Element Policy LG1 prioritizes the use of available resources for affordable housing over all other development, but we would not get affordable housing on this site. We need more public/private partnerships to get that stage of affordable housing.
- Historic Resources Element HR2 ensures respectful and compatible development that respects individual historic resources as well as the neighborhood and the overall historical character of the City. This project achieves that and the HLC representatives stated that clearly.
- Appreciates the proposed paseo to connect State St. and Ortega St. The tree lined paseo and plantings will be different than many paseos and will be lovely. The plantings will also help with the stormwater treatment on site.
- Likes the setback on State St. for outdoor dining.
- Appreciate the Applicant's perspective drawings. They go a long way in telling a story.
- It was mentioned that there were 10,000 signatures against the project the last time it was before the Commission. The signatures were not against the project, but rather against demolition of The Press Room. The Applicant has made it clear that there is an agreement with the operators of The Press Room. The issue is between the owner and the tenant. It is out of the Commission's hands since it isn't a historic building, and it has been analyzed. If there is an opportunity for The Press Room to come into this project in the future, that would be good.
- Wishes the project was housing but can support the project and the recommended findings.

Commissioner Boss:

- Everyday we hear about the housing crisis, but there is never mention of a hotel crisis or a need for hotel over housing.
- The City is not moving fast enough to address the housing issues.
- Cannot find that this project as proposed is a community benefit that outweighs housing in this location.
- The City's General Plan prioritizes the use of available resources for affordable housing over all other new developments.
- The previous project that was proposed was also a mixed-use building but included 36 residential rental units using the AUD incentive programs, with 3 moderate income units.
- The comments from the Planning Commission at the 2020 concept hearing were helpful.
- Had the City taken staff's original recommendation on the hotel moratorium, this project would not be allowed to move forward.
- Does not support this project as proposed because she does not find it consistent with the principles of sound community planning, especially around community engagement, and does not see a community benefit of hotel over housing.

Commissioner DeLuccio:

- A hotel is an allowed use on this site.
- Like the other Commissioners, he wants affordable housing in the City, and if the previously proposed project had gone forward it would only have provided 3 affordable housing units.
- Applicant could have used the AUD bonus density to go up to 65 housing units, but it still would only have given 11 affordable units.

- The General Plan Housing Element has not been approved yet, but once it is adopted we will be looking at some principles on how to move forward to get more affordable housing.
- Other cities require 30% of residential buildings that are being built to be affordable housing or to pay into a housing fund. Commercial projects still need to pay into an affordable housing fund to supply housing. If we had something like this in place previously, we would be in a better place. Will advocate for that going forward.
- There are so many vacant retail sites on State St, we do not need another one of this size.
- Can make the findings for the Development Plan.
- Concerned there is not a requirement for neighborhood meetings, as other cities have.
- Leaning towards approving the project today.

Commissioner Wardlow:

- Thanks to applicant and staff for the presentation and discussion.
- Does not see how this project is consistent with or advancing sound community planning when we are talking about this as a potential community benefit or revitalization of an area that has an existing tenant that had overwhelming support from the community and significant backlash at the thought of losing that tenant.
- Had the expectation that if this Applicant was going to come before the Commission without a housing project or a project that would be considered a community benefit, that they would have done significant community outreach prior to the hearing. The understanding is that there has been no community outreach after the significant outpour of opposition from the previous application and this was going to take place after the applicant received approval from the Planning Commission. Her understanding is that there has been no engagement between the Applicant and The Press Room or understanding on how they will relocate The Press Room as that would take place after the project received approval from the Planning Commission. No understating of the amount of people to be hired, the wages they will receive, if they will be unionized until after the project received approval from the Planning Commission. Has concerns with this given the comments on the housing crisis that we face and the significant importance the City leadership has placed on creating housing.
- There are two issues, this project does not create housing and this project displaces a long-standing tenant that has overwhelming support from the community.
- At this point, cannot make the findings that this is sound community planning, nor that this project will not have a significant adverse impact on our community's aesthetic or character.
- Wants the Applicant to do additional outreach prior to approval or denial of the project.
- Suggests a continuance to allow applicant to do significant public outreach. Asks fellow Commissioners to consider a continuation so the Applicant can come back after doing the significant outreach and where we can hear more from the Press Room and the community on the impact this could have on the Ortega and State Street community.
- Supports Baucke's request to bring forth a moratorium on hotels after this project.

Commissioner Lodge:

- When 710 State Street came to Planning Commission in 2020 as a mixed-use project with 36 units, 3 of which were inclusionary, it was exactly the type of project that she would have hoped for when the AUD program was established. It would have provided badly needed housing in a beautifully designed building with great livability, and plenty of

open yard. It would have ensured that as long as the AUD ordinance remained enforced, that with the lots being combined to achieve the density needed, the project would maintain the existing 1 or 2 story buildings. It would help preserve the Santa Barbara small town feel and lessen the job/housing imbalance.

- Was disappointed when she heard that the project had shifted to hotel instead of the AUD project. A project that was just what Santa Barbara needed was exchanged for a project that was what was not needed- more hotel rooms with more low- wage jobs, no place for those workers to live, and worsening the jobs/housing imbalance. The RHNA numbers are based in part on the imbalance and the City could be hurt with even greater numbers.
- This is a site where hotel use is allowed under the General Plan and zoning.
- Has trouble with the sound community planning findings.
- Finds that this is a very troublesome project for those reasons.

Commissioner Baucke:

- It is a very well-designed project and fits into the fabric of State Street very well and the ownership and Mr. Moore and his design team should be commended for their outstanding design work.
- Has personally wrestled with Development Plan finding number 2, which is whether the proposed development is consistent with the principles of sound community planning.
- Also wrestled with finding number 3 regarding whether there would be an adverse impact on longstanding cultural or significant resource, which the Press Room falls within.
- Continues to ask if the removal of properties that are targeted for housing under the priority housing overlay in a housing crisis is sound community planning.
- However, he has a strong commitment to the thought and principle of intentional development and truth in zoning. We should make it clear what we want, where we want it and what we don't want.
- The zoning allows for hotels as a permitted use at the same level of priority as housing, and that does need to change.
- This is another missed opportunity to make progress on the housing front. This project will add additional demand for affordable housing with the addition of more low-wage hotel workers.
- The Applicant mentioned that he was proposing to incentivize people to ride the bus in from other communities to staff the hotel, which brings up the concern about mitigation for housing impacts which has been discussed in other projects.
- Action needs to be taken to lower the priority of hotels so that they are clearly depicted as less important than housing. At a minimum, hotels should be subject to a conditional use permit and not allowed by right.
- Recommends that after this project, there is a recommendation that the Council reconsider a hotel moratorium or alternatively, that Council starts the process to require conditional use permits for hotels located in the housing priority zone and start a process to adopt a hotel development mitigation fee program.
- On the fence with this project.

MOTION: Wardlow / Boss

Continue indefinitely until the Applicant can perform community outreach and provide their results to the Commission in order for the Commission to make the Sound Community Planning findings.

Commission discussion on the motion.

The motion failed by the following vote:

Ayes: 3 Noes: 3 (DeLuccio, Lodge, and Wiscomb) Abstain: 0 Absent: 1 (Bonderson)

MOTION: DeLuccio / Boss

Continue indefinitely so the project can return to a Full Commission.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Ayes: 5 Noes: 1 (Wiscomb) Abstain: 0 Absent: 1 (Bonderson)

Commissioner Wiscomb stated that she could not support the motion because the discussion became all about The Press Room, and the Applicant and Owner have already stated there is an agreement in place with The Press Room. We are entering a slippery slope where the Commission is asking applicants to come back, which is very costly for them. The project received high praise from the Historic Landmarks Commission and the Applicant has demonstrated their sound community planning as outlined by staff. We would not be getting affordable housing with this project, and it should have been approved today.

IV. ADMINISTRATIVE AGENDA**ACTUAL TIME: 3:39 P.M.****A. Committee and Liaison Reports:****1. Staff Hearing Officer Liaison Report**

No report.

2. Other Committee and Liaison Reports

- a. Commissioner Lodge reported on the August 16, 2023 meeting of the Creeks Advisory Committee.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Vice Chair Baucke adjourned the meeting at 3:43 p.m.

Submitted by,

Kira Esparza, Commission Secretary