



DATE: September 13, 2017

AGENDA ITEM # 2

AGENDA REPORT

TO: Parks and Recreation Commission

FROM: Zachary Dahl, Planning Services Manager – Current Planning

SUBJECT: New Public Plaza and Office Building – 101-151 First Street

RECOMMENDATION:

Recommend approval of the proposed public plaza to the Planning and Transportation Commission and City Council

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A new 22,000 square-foot public plaza (aka First Street Green) is proposed on the western portion of Public Parking Plaza 7, along First Street, and on the properties where the Area 151 Arcade and Bumble Café are currently located. The public plaza would be located on portion of Plaza 7 (14,600 square feet) and on private property (7,400 square feet) with a public access easement to allow for public use of the space. As part of the development of the public plaza, and associated improvements, 67 existing surface public parking spaces would be relocated into the new underground parking garage.

The project also includes a Commercial Design Review application for a new three-story, 77,000 square-foot office building at 101-151 First Street with three levels of underground parking and a 1,200 square-foot café on the first floor at the south end of the building. The site includes eight existing commercial buildings, all of which would be demolished as part of the project. A cover letter from the applicant that provides additional information about the proposed public plaza is included as Attachment A and the plans for the new public plaza are included as Attachment B.

The project site is designated as Downtown Commercial in the General Plan and zoned CD/R3 (Commercial Downtown/Multi-Family). Plaza 7 is designated as Public and Institutional in the General Plan and zoned CRS (Commercial Retail Sales). The General Plan has multiple goals, policies and objectives that support the new commercial development and new public amenities Downtown and the proposed uses are permitted in both zone districts.

The Los Altos Parks Plan, which was adopted in 2012, also includes a number of recommendations and priorities that support the development of a new public plaza in the Downtown area. Specifically, the Plan recommends that the City seek opportunities to increase the overall parkland acreage to citizen ratio, provide a new park in north Los Altos and create new open space, with a playground, picnic area and/or public restrooms, in downtown.

BACKGROUND

The project applicant, Los Altos Community Investments (LACI), owns the eight connected parcels along First Street (101-151 First Street) that are adjacent to Plaza 7. In the summer of 2016, LACI established the First Street Green Park Foundation and approached the City about a possible public/private partnership to fund and construct a new public plaza with underground parking on the western portion of the City owned public parking lot along First Street (Parking Plaza 7). In parallel with the public plaza proposal, LACI and its development manager Sares Regis, have developed and submitted a design review application to build a new office building on their First Street properties.

On September 13, 2016 and January 10, 2017, joint study sessions with the City Council and the Planning and Transportation Commission were held to discuss the office building and public plaza design concepts and provide preliminary guidance to staff and the applicant. The study sessions concluded with the Council and Commission expressing interest in further developing the design concept for a public plaza on a portion of Parking Plaza 7. There were also concerns raised about the project being initiated before the completion of the Downtown Visioning process and losing the convenience and accessibility of surface level public parking if it were to be moved into an underground parking garage.

Following the joint-study session on January 10, 2017, the City Council reviewed and approved an Exclusive Negotiating Rights Agreement (ENA) with LACI to allow them to further explore the concept of developing a public plaza on the western portion of Plaza 7.

As part of the public outreach for the proposal, the public plaza design concept was presented to the Planning and Transportation Commission (PTC) and Parks and Recreation Commission (PARC) at public meetings this past spring. On May 4, 2017, the PTC held a study session to review and provide input on the architecture and site design of the proposed office building and the public plaza. While the focus of the study session was on the office building, the Commission expressed general support for developing the public plaza and increasing the number of public parking spaces. On May 10, 2017, LACI presented their preliminary public plaza design to the PARC as a special presentation and answered questions from commissioners. Since the public plaza was presented as special presentation, the PARC did not take a position on the proposal at that meeting.

On June 27, 2017, the City Council held a study session to discuss the proposed public plaza and provide feedback on if there was support for moving forward with the negotiations period of the ENA, which would allow LACI to proceed with a more detailed public plaza design. Following public comments and Council member discussion, the Council expressed supported for moving forward with Phase II of the ENA, provided all conditions of the agreement are met, and developing a more detailed public plaza design.

DISCUSSION

Since the project includes a new public plaza, a review by the Parks and Recreation Commissions has been included in the approval process. The focus of the discussion should be on the public plaza and project amenities and elements that support or impact the public plaza. The goal of this review is to get a recommendation from PARC that can be forwarded to the Planning and Transportation Commission and City Council when they consider the project. The action should include an overall

position on the public plaza, should it be approved or denied, as well as any specific comments, changes and/or modifications that PARC feels are necessary for the plaza to meet City standards for a new public space.

With regard to the public plaza, the landscape plan sheets (L1-L4) provide specific details and information about the proposed public plaza, including a site plan, furniture, features and amenities, specifications of proposed tree and landscaping, and potential uses and programing. Sheets G2.01 and G2.02 provide 3D color renderings of the proposed public plaza and office building to provide a better spatial understanding of the project.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This project will require an environmental initial study and a Mitigated Negative Declaration as required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). This evaluation is currently underway and will be completed prior to review by the PTC.

Attachments:

- A. Applicant Cover Letter
- B. Project Landscape Plans
- C. Project Architectural Plans