



CITY OF SANTA MARIA
PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

JULY 16, 2025

PERLMAN APARTMENTS DOWNTOWN PERMIT

Property Location: 100 N Broadway

Review of a Downtown Permit (DT2025-0003) for the Vernon Group and Danco to construct a six-story building consisting of five-stories of 150 affordable apartments above a 40,000-square-foot podium with parking and residential amenities on a 1.12-acre site in the Gateway District of the Downtown Specific Plan.

Environmental: The project was adequately covered in a previously certified Final Environmental Impact Report for the Santa Maria Downtown Specific Plan (SCH 2007041105) pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act State Guidelines Section 15162.

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RECOMMENDATION:

By motion, recommend that the City Council approve Downtown Permit (DT2025-0003).

BACKGROUND

The applicants propose to redevelop a 1.2-acre parcel located at the northeast corner of Main Street and Broadway with a new six-story affordable apartment project. The project site is currently developed with Rosalind Perlman Park, a City park that includes a playground, pond, gazebo, mature trees, and several commemorative flower gardens and plaques. The project would remove the existing park and construct a new 197,000-square-foot six-story apartment building with 150 new affordable rental apartment units.

The Union Plaza Apartments and Teamsters Local 986 are located north of the site, Santa Maria Sewing Superstore and Central Plaza Park/Central Plaza Apartments to the east. The Gateway Mixed Use building and North China Restaurant are located across Broadway to the west, and the Firefighter's Memorial Plaza and planned location of Alvin Newton Apartments are to the south, across Main Street (Attachment A – Vicinity Map).

The project site is in the SP/Gateway (Specific Plan/Gateway) zoning district within the Downtown Specific Plan and is identified as a "critical corner" of the downtown. Since the project is over 10,000 square feet in size, a Downtown Permit that is reviewed by the Planning Commission for a recommendation to the City Council for final determination is required.

Declaration of Surplus Land and Sales and Disposition Agreement

On June 1, 2021, the City Council adopted a resolution (No. 2021-54) declaring several specific City-owned parcels as surplus land. This project parcel (identified as the Perlman Park site) was included in the 4.28-acres of declared surplus land. The proposed affordable housing project satisfies the Surplus Lands Act (SLA) of California (Government Code 54221) provision requiring that at least 25-percent of the housing units proposed as part of a development be deed-restricted affordable to lower income households for a period of 55 years. The property is subject to the Sales and Disposition Agreement (SDA) that was approved by the City Council on August 20, 2024. The terms and conditions of the SDA are included in the Council Agenda Report from that meeting date.

Public Meetings

The preliminary concept for this project was presented to the City Council at the May 5, 2024 public meeting, prior to the applicant proceeding with preparing more detailed plans for formal review. The presentation showed the general massing and proposed architectural style of the building and invited feedback on the design. The council members' comments on the design concept were positive and no public comment was received regarding the project at that time. The project was also reviewed by the Downtown Revitalization Committee on May 29, 2025. At this meeting, the Committee received a presentation from staff and discussed all aspects of the project, including the project's affordability and place in the overall downtown revitalization vision and plan, as well as the project site plan, floor plan, and overall building design. The Committee members asked questions about vehicular circulation for the building, the residential-only use of the building, the sizes and affordability of the units, replacement requirements for the large mature trees on the park site, the Santa Maria Valley Beautiful movement, and the Perlman family.

On June 5, 2025, the project was reviewed by the Planning Commission at a Study Session. The project was well received overall with some Commissioners expressing a desire for additional architectural details on the north and west elevations of the building, a clearer picture of the proposed street-level architectural finishes, a vehicle loading area for the residents, and an optional water feature in the courtyard.

Those in attendance from the public mentioned concerns regarding the loss of parkland, proximity of the proposed building to the existing Union Plaza apartments creating a loss of views to the south, traffic and pedestrian safety, and parking issues. Commissioners echoed some of the concerns regarding the building proximity to Union Plaza and pedestrian crossing at Main Street. The applicant has responded to the concern regarding building proximity to Union Plaza by providing the building separation distance measurement, which ranges between 13.5-feet and 15-feet. Staff has provided additional analysis in the Setback section of this report, addressing the potential view impacts to the 14 Union Plaza Apartment units facing the project to the south. The applicant has also prepared a traffic study which includes safety analysis of the intersections and provided recommendations for improving pedestrian and vehicular safety. The project is also conditioned to incorporate additional architectural interest on the north and west elevations such as a painted mural or green wall.

DISCUSSION

The proposed project meets the intent of the Downtown Specific Plan by creating a multi-storied residential building with integrated ground floor leasing office space. The project also provides design components encouraged by the Plan, such as sidewalks that provide direct access to building entrances, building materials and finishes that are true to the structure's architectural style, landscaped areas, and building massing that steps back upper floors to create open areas such as the second-floor courtyard.

The proposed apartment building will include 150 residential units (15 studio units with average area of 411 square feet, 53 one-bedroom units with average area of 583 square feet, 38 two-bedroom units with average area of 778 square feet, and 44 three-bedroom units with average area of 1,105 square feet). The rental units would be 100 percent affordable (except for a market-rate manager's unit), with an overall affordability of 60-percent Area Median Income (AMI). The ground floor of the building will contain a 1,000-square-foot leasing office, bike storage and a mail room, along with 77 parking stalls. Access to the upper floors is provided by a stairwell and two elevators in the lobby, and two other stairwells on the opposite sides of the building. Vehicle access to the building will be provided via two driveways, one on the northwest side of the building fronting Broadway, and one on the northeast side of the building via the alley.

The second floor includes additional residential amenities including two open-to-the-sky resident courtyards with a mixture of planter boxes and potted plants to accent and soften the proposed multipurpose activity areas. Interior resident amenities include a small fitness center, a community room, and a bike storage room. Each floor also includes tall ceilings, a common laundry room, and a common trash disposal room.

Building Height

The building height is proposed at approximately 71 feet tall, with roof projections and the tallest tower elements at 83 feet in height. The s-tile roof and tower features improve the overall roofline significantly, avoiding boxiness. The Gateway district allows a maximum height of 70 feet, measuring from the average finish grade to the highest point of the roof, including roof equipment and screening. Extra height may be considered for architectural elements or features on a case-by-case basis through the Downtown Permit process if superior design is achieved. Additionally, as this project is proposed to be 100-percent affordable, under California's Density Bonus Law, the project would qualify for waived or reduced development standards such as modified building height limit requirements.

Setbacks

The Downtown Specific Plan requires a minimum zero front yard setback for buildings located along the Main Street and/or Broadway corridors, five-foot side yard setbacks and a ten-foot rear yard setback. The project has a minimum setback of at least seven feet around the entire building. The project complies with the minimum front and side yard setbacks, and the applicant is requesting a modification of the ten-foot rear building setback required by the Downtown Specific Plan. Setback reductions may be granted

through the Downtown Specific Plan on a case-by-case basis through the Downtown Permit process if superior design is achieved. As the project is proposed to be 100-percent affordable, under California's Density Bonus Law, the project qualifies for waived or reduced development standards, which may include reduced setback requirements.

At the Study Session, Commissioners and the public raised concerns regarding the building's proximity to the neighboring seven-story apartment building, Union Plaza. Along the building facing Union Plaza, the project's building setbacks from the shared property line fronting the two buildings ranges between seven feet, eight inches, and 22 feet, with an average setback of 14 feet, seven and a half inches. The building separation is greater than the dimensions listed above, ranging between 13 feet, nine inches, and 28 feet, three inches. The average distance between the two buildings is approximately 21 feet. For comparison, the average width of an alley in Santa Maria is 12 feet.

Architecture

The exterior colors and stucco and tile materials of the building are consistent with a Mission/Spanish Revival vernacular architecture, complementary to the Gateway Mixed-Use building and the proposed Alvin Newton Apartments on the two adjacent corners of Main Street and Broadway. At the intersection, the building steps back to provide angled corners for driver visibility. The ground floor features large arches with either storefront windows, murals, or parking garage openings framed with climbing vines to provide a human scale to the building for a pleasant pedestrian experience. Decorative tiles along the first foot above sidewalk provide additional detail and character to the streetscape. The upper floors feature significant variations in wall planes, recessed windows with dark bronze colored vinyl windows and Juliette balconies. There are numerous public art/mural opportunities provided on the building from the ground floor alcoves to the tall tower elements of the elevator shafts and stairwells.

Landscape

The design provides approximately 6,737 square-feet of irrigated landscape area, and 1,855 square-feet of non-irrigated (artificial turf), equating to approximately 17.5 percent of the site. The Downtown Specific Plan allows features such as the rooftop patio with planters and seating to be credited toward meeting the landscape area requirements. Site amenities include two large deck courtyards for the residents, planter boxes, seating and trees. Indoor amenities include a common room, fitness center, mailroom, multiple bike storage rooms and a leasing office. The project would require removal of 18 large mature trees from the site; however, the project will be required to replace the trees on site or pay an in-lieu fee for the City to plant the trees elsewhere in the landscape maintenance district. The trees would be required to be replaced at up to a 6 to 1 ratio for every tree removed for the project.

The project landscape plans incorporate the Geranium flower, the City of Santa Maria's Official Flower. The flowers are planted in honor of Ethel-May Dorsey Conrad, who was instrumental in promoting recognition of the Official City Flower. Mrs. Conrad founded Santa Maria Valley Beautiful in 1963 and was also instrumental in establishing Central Park Plaza, the linear park to the northeast of the project. The Recreation and Parks Department will work closely with the applicant to respectfully remove, temporarily store during construction, and relocate all of the existing memorials and plaques to appropriate locations on the site.

Parking

According to the Downtown Specific Plan, the project is required to provide 133 parking spaces, and the project is proposing 78 parking spaces onsite. Per the historical Reciprocal Easement (REA) for Town Center and the SDA, the City will provide the applicant use of the City-owned parking garage located south of Main Street for the remaining required parking spaces (55 spaces) that cannot be accommodated on the project site. Several conditions of approval have been incorporated to require the project applicant to enter into a contractual agreement with the City for the use, refurbishment, security and ongoing maintenance of a portion of the existing City-owned parking lots that are to be used by the project. Although parking will be permitted on the City lots, the parking spaces will be non-exclusive; therefore, parking will not be on a reserved or permit basis.

Incentives

The project qualifies for incentives based on the new development requirements of the Downtown Specific Plan and outlined in the special findings for Downtown Permits. The incentives for reuse projects are based on how much the project conforms to the development standards and design guidelines of the Downtown Specific Plan. Since this project has met the majority of the development standards that are feasible for this type of project and due to the size of the site, the Community Development Department has agreed to reduce fees by 50 percent for the project's building permits. The Downtown Specific Plan allows the applicant to request a payment plan for the project's AB 1600/Growth Mitigation fees, with a maximum period of ten years, through an agreement processed with the City Attorney. According to the SDA, additional incentives are available, and most incentives are contingent on meeting the incentive timelines outlined in the SDA attachments.

Housing

As this is an affordable housing project, California's Housing and Accountability Act applies. The Act limits the City's discretion to reduce the number of units proposed, or to deny the project. If the Commission were to consider recommending the denial of this project, specific findings must be developed based on documented evidence that the project will cause specific, adverse impacts upon the public health or safety, and that there are no feasible methods to satisfactorily mitigate or avoid the adverse impacts.

Environmental

The project was adequately covered in a previously certified program Environmental Impact Report prepared for the Downtown Specific Plan (SCH# 20077041105) pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) State Guidelines Section 15162. None of the conditions specified in CEQA Section 15162 requiring the preparation of a subsequent EIR have occurred with the proposed project. Therefore, the proposed project may rely on the previously certified Final Environmental Impact Report prepared for the Downtown Specific Plan as adequate environmental review under CEQA. No further environmental review is required.

Attachments

- A – Vicinity Map
- B – Permit
- C – Plan Set