



CITY OF SANTA MARIA
PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT
AUGUST 16, 2023

ALVIN NEWTON APARTMENTS DOWNTOWN PERMIT.

Property Location: Southeast corner of Main Street and Broadway

Review of a Downtown Permit (DT2022-0022) for The Vernon Group to construct a 6-story, 75,340-square-foot mixed-use building with 5,760-square-feet of ground floor commercial, 82 apartment units, a rooftop deck, outdoor plazas, parking, and a firefighters' memorial on a 1.49-acre site in the Gateway District of the Downtown Specific Plan.

Environmental: The project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15332 (Class 32), Infill Development.

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RECOMMENDATION:

That the Planning Commission, by motion, recommend the City Council approve Downtown Permit (DT2022-0022).

BACKGROUND

The Vernon Group proposes to construct a 75,340-square-foot six-story mixed-use building on the southeast corner of Main Street and Broadway to include a 5,760-square-foot commercial space, and 82-market-rate rental apartment units. The 0.6-acre project site is a portion of a larger 1.49-acre lot and is located at the southeast corner of Main Street and Broadway and is in the SP/Gateway (Specific Plan/Gateway) zoning district within the Downtown Specific Plan (Attachment A – Vicinity Map). The project land area includes the Firefighter Memorial/Four Corners Plaza area north of Bank of America, which is part of APN 125-320-050, the same parcel as the existing parking garage. The Santa Maria Town Center is just southeast of the project site. Boot Barn and Union Plaza are to the west across Broadway, and to the north, across Main Street, respectively. The Downtown Specific Plan identifies the project site location 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 a final determination is required.

Development Agreement

On August 16, 2022, the City Council adopted a resolution (no. 2022-92) approving the Disposition and Development Agreement (DDA) with the Vernon Property Group, LLC for the construction of a multi-story mixed-use development, consisting of ground-floor commercial retail and above-ground apartment housing units. The DDA outlined the design expectation for the project, including minimum square footages of ground-floor commercial uses, dining/food establishments and outdoor plaza areas. In exchange, the City agreed to provide project incentives as long as performance standards are met, including timing for the project completion within 36 months of building permit issuance. The terms and conditions of the DDA are included in the Council Agenda Report from that aforementioned meeting date.

Downtown Revitalization Committee

This project was reviewed by the Downtown Revitalization Committee on July 12, 2023. At this meeting, committee members reviewed the project's site plan, floor plan and overall building design. The Committee also discussed the applicant's ongoing communication with community stakeholders regarding the firefighter memorial in honor of Santa Maria firefighter Mr. Alvin Newton, who perished in the Bradley Hotel fire on that site. Since this meeting, the applicant has met with the Local Firefighter's Union to continue the discussions.

DISCUSSION

The Vernon Group has applied for a Downtown Permit to construct a 75,340-square-foot six-story mixed use building in the Gateway district of the Downtown Specific Plan. The project proposes an entire build-out of the corner plaza site, which is appropriate in the urban core of the city at the primary intersection of the downtown. The scale and design of the building helps to bring form to the streetscape and continues the framework for a pedestrian-oriented downtown experience, which has begun with the construction of the Gateway Mixed Use project located on the opposite corner of the Main street and Broadway intersection. As with the Gateway project, this building features numerous building entrances oriented toward the street, encouraging the pedestrian focus.

Vehicular access to the building will be provided by the existing driveway to the adjacent City-owned parking structure. The building is designed to extend eastward over the driveway to align with the parking garage. Due to structural limitations with the existing parking garage, the project does not propose to attach to the garage, but residents and patrons of the commercial uses will still have ready and convenient access to parking via the ground floor entrances.

Integral to the design of the project and the requirements of the DDA are outdoor plazas and gathering spaces. On the ground floor, the project proposes two large outdoor gathering spaces in the form of an outdoor patio area for possible food-related tenants, and the previously mentioned memorial plaza, which will be sheltered by the prevailing wind and street noises to allow for a quieter urban setting under large shade trees. Seating and a firefighter memorial are also proposed.

The ground floor of the building will contain approximately 5,760-square-feet of commercial space that has been designed for maximum flexibility for a variety of retail, food-related or service uses allowed by the Downtown Specific Plan (DTSP, Page 38). Also on the ground floor is a private residential lobby with access to a bike storage room and a centrally located elevator. Two stairwells on the east and west sides of the building also provide residential access to the upper floors.

On the upper floors, 82 market-rate residential units are proposed, primarily with one-bedroom apartments, but with several studios and two-bedroom units mixed in as well. 17 units are proposed per floor, with the exception of the roof deck level, where 14 units are proposed, surrounding the centralized 1,400-square-foot common space. The roof deck offers group seating and flowering or fruiting trees. All residential units feature tall ceilings, washer/dryer hookups, and large windows. As a condition of approval, the project is required to provide in-unit washer/dryers or a common laundry facility on each floor.

Downtown Specific Plan

The Gateway District consists of the properties along the highly traveled roadways of Main Street and Broadway. The specific plan states that beautification of these corridors is essential to the revitalization of the downtown. The project meets the *Downtown Vision* and the *Gateway District Vision* by creating a multi-storied building along the sidewalk that is pedestrian-oriented in the core of the city center with an integrated mix of land uses (retail, office, residential). This helps to create a well-designed, dynamic street scene with ground level businesses that provide a pedestrian-friendly environment with attractive and engaging storefronts.

The project also meets all applicable Design Guidelines established by the Downtown Specific Plan which includes:

- Sidewalks that provide direct access to building entrances;
- Building, window, and balcony orientation that maximize views while preserving the privacy of the surrounding neighbors;
- Architecture that integrates with the adjacent properties and provides functional and aesthetically pleasing pedestrian and vehicular circulation;
- An infill building that is more than two-stories taller than the surrounding existing buildings that incorporates upper floors that step back and create balconies overlooking dining areas, plazas, and outdoor spaces;
- A building on corner lot that incorporates prominent architectural elements such as tower elements and has corner walkthroughs to provide visibility;
- Ornamentation and color on trims and eaves to create horizontal emphasis and reduce the dominance of tall structures;
- A 360-degree building design with the articulation and detailing of all building facades; and
- Building materials and finishes that are true to the structure's architectural style.

Architecture

Similar to and compatible with the surrounding area buildings in the downtown, the project is designed in a classic Spanish Mission style architecture which is defined by repetition of forms and shapes, symmetry in building elements, and high-quality materials. Large arched windows trimmed with dark bronze or precast stone on the street-front attract the eye and provide a strong base for the building. Upper floors are enhanced by variations in wall planes, stepped stucco corbels, wrought iron balconies, fabric awnings, and decorative tile inserts on the tower elements. The building's roof massing is varied to provide additional interest, while stairwell tower elements anchor the building adjacent to the parking garage. On the corner of Main and Broadway, the building steps back to provide angled corners for driver visibility and space for outdoor dining activity, creating opportunity for a vibrant corner at the heart of downtown.

Height

The six-story building ceiling height is proposed at 70-feet tall, with roof projections and the tallest tower elements at 85-feet in height. 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. As outlined previously in this report, the project meets all applicable Design Guidelines established by the Downtown Specific Plan and the extra height is provided as additional architectural interest and variation in roof planes to prevent the appearance of bulk, therefore staff supports the extra height for the tower elements.

Parking

Per the Downtown Specific Plan, residential projects are required to provide on-site parking per unit, according to the unit size: 0.5 of a space is required for each unit less than 400 square feet in size, 0.75 of a space for units 400-600 square feet in size, and one space per for those units larger than 600 square feet. Based on the sizes of the 82 units proposed, this development is required to provide 83 parking spaces. The Downtown Specific Plan allows for a reduction of parking requirements based on the proximity of the project site to City-owned parking lots and/or structures. No parking is required for commercial uses if the parcel is located within 700-feet of a City parking lot/structure (Parking Incentive Zone Map, Zone A, Pages 44-45 DTSP). The adjacent parking structure east of the project and north of the Town Center East building has 1,078 parking spaces, and the parking structure to the south of Town Center East, on Cook Street, has 1,800 spaces. In addition, reduced parking for residential uses may be approved on a case-by-case basis through the Downtown Permit process if justification is provided and superior design is achieved.

Per the historical Reciprocal Easement (REA) for Town Center and the DDA, the City will provide the applicant use of the city-owned parking garage located adjacent to the property at a rate of two spaces per unit for the residential units at the Property. Several conditions of approval have been incorporated to require the project property owner to enter into a contractual agreement with the City for the use, refurbishment, 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.

Landscape

The design provides approximately 4,400-square-feet of irrigated landscape area and planters on-site, equating to approximately 16.4-percent of the site. Additionally, the Downtown Specific Plan allows features such as the rooftop patio with planters and seating, to be credited toward meeting the landscape area requirements, therefore the project well exceeds the required 15 percent landscape coverage requirement. Site amenities include a memorial plaza area, private balcony areas, planter boxes, seating and flowering trees provided both in the plaza and for the upper-level patio area.

Firefighter Memorial

Mr. William Alvin Newton was a reserve Santa Maria Firefighter and police officer who perished in the Bradley Hotel Fire on April 25, 1970, on the site where this project is proposed. As a tribute to his memory, the applicant, City Staff and Firefighter stakeholders including the Newton Family and Santa Maria Firefighters Local 2020 have met on several occasions to discuss and plan for the renewal of the memorial. Currently on site is a memorial bronze plaque with the Fireman's Prayer. Discussions and planning are underway for the creation of the memorial, such as a large bronze statue, as well as a large memorial foundation for the future placement of the memorial in the center of the plaza area. A condition of approval (No. 2) has been incorporated into the Downtown Permit to require submittal of plans for the memorial to the City for review and approval prior to building permit issuance. Additionally, a public access easement or dedication to the Recreation and Parks Department is required to cover the plaza area and is required to be recordable prior to building occupancy.

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 Downtown Specific Plan. Since this project has met the majority of the development standards that are feasible for this type of project and 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 DDA, additional incentives are available, and most incentives are contingent on meeting the incentive timelines outlined in the DDA attachments.

Environmental

This project qualifies as a Class 32 (In-Fill Development Projects) Categorical Exemption under Section 15332 of the State California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines. The project is consistent with the Specific Plan land use designation and the Gateway zone district and is consistent with the Downtown Specific Plan. The site is 0.60-acres in size and is substantially surrounded by urban uses. The site is developed and has no value as habitat for endangered, rare, or threatened species. A traffic study was prepared for the project indicating that area intersections would continue to operate at acceptable levels of service, and according to the City's Environmental Procedures and adopted Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) thresholds, the project would result in VMT rates that are below the City's adopted thresholds. Therefore, approval of the project would not result in significant effects relating to water quality, air quality, traffic, or noise. No further environmental review is required.

CONCLUSION

The project meets the vision, intent, goals, and development standards of the Downtown Specific Plan. The building orientation and design will be a great enhancement to the Main Street and Broadway intersection and would be influential in guiding the future physical form of the Downtown. The mix of uses will add more people living in and using the downtown which will aid in the revitalization efforts of the downtown. This project can be a great catalyst in attracting more redevelopment in the area and spurring surrounding businesses and property owners to enhance their facades or improve their buildings. This project is an example of the standard and quality that all future downtown projects should achieve.

Attachments

- A – Vicinity Map
- B – Downtown Permit
- C – Plan Set
- D – Disposition and Development Agreement
- E – Traffic Study
- F – CalEEMod (California Emissions Estimator Model) Summary Report