



DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE

AGENDA ITEM

AGENDA DATE: OCTOBER 5, 2016
TO: Chair Fox and Members of the Design Review Committee
THRU: Anna Pehoushek, Assistant Community Development Director
FROM: Marissa Moshier, Associate Planner - Historic Preservation
SUBJECT: DRC No. 4807-15 – Killefer Square

SUMMARY

The applicant proposes to adaptively reuse a historic school building and construct new buildings for student housing. The Spanish Colonial Revival style school building is listed separately in the National Register of Historic Places. The project will include 81 units of apartment-style student housing with a total of 354 beds. The proposed student housing use will require approval of a Specific Plan for the development. The Design Review Committee (DRC) conducted a preliminary review of the project on September 2, 2015 and August 17, 2016. The applicant is requesting a third preliminary review by the DRC to receive additional feedback on the revised project, including rehabilitation of the historic building and the mass, scale and design of the new construction.

RECOMMENDED ACTION – PRELIMINARY REVIEW

Staff recommends that the DRC review the proposed project and provide comments to the applicant regarding the site plan, mass, scale, design and materials of the project for conformance with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* and compatibility with the neighborhood.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Applicant: Western States Housing Development Co.
Owner: Orange Unified School District
Property Location: 541 N. Lemon Street
General Plan Designation: PFI (Public Facilities and Institutions)
Zoning Classification: R-3 (Multi-Family Residential)

Existing Development: 9,900 SF former elementary school building, constructed in 1931 and separately listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Two detached pre-fabricated classroom buildings and one storage shed, constructed between 1980 and 1991.

Property Size: 1.82 acres

Associated Applications: Specific Plan, Zone Change

Previous DRC Review: Preliminary reviews on September 2, 2015 and August 17, 2016

PUBLIC NOTICE

No Public Notice was required for the preliminary review of this project.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicant proposes to convert the existing historic school building into six student housing units and to construct new buildings containing 75 student housing units. The major project components include:

- Demolition of non-contributing classroom buildings and storage shed.
- Alterations to the historic building.
 - Rehabilitation of exterior historic building elements, including wood windows, clay tile roof, octagonal tower, courtyard corridor and outdoor stage.
 - Construction of new interior partitions within existing classrooms to create the housing units. The partitions will be glazed in the area below the ceiling to allow a sense of the original classroom space.
 - Preservation of existing historic doors to the exterior corridor around the courtyard and addition of a small number of new doors to access the units.
 - Construction of two small additions on the north and south sides of the building, connected to the building by trellises.
- Construction of new buildings, containing 75 apartment-style student housing units with one to four bedrooms.
 - In response to DRC comments from the previous review, the applicant has rearranged the mass of the new construction to open a view corridor to the courtyard of the historic building from N. Lemon Street. The area of the view corridor is occupied by playing fields, landscape areas, and a ramp accessing the underground parking. A portion of the courtyard-facing rear elevation of the historic school will be visible from N. Lemon Street on the west side of the property.
 - The view corridor is flanked by three story buildings which are oriented east-west on the property, lining up with the east-west wings of the historic school. The buildings are 48 feet from the rear of the historic school and approximately 30 feet tall.

- A large six story building is proposed for the northwest corner of the property. The building is between approximately 54 feet tall.
- The new buildings are designed with a combination of a smooth plaster finish and brick and a composition shingle roof.
- Construction of two levels of subterranean parking, providing 183 spaces, under the new buildings.

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

Killefer School was designated in the National Register on April 7, 2015 under Criterion A (associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history) and Criterion C (embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction). The significance of the property is summarized in the designation form:

The Lydia D. Killefer School is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the area of Social History for its association with school desegregation in Southern California. The period of significance under Criterion A is 1942-1944, reflecting the year during which the school began the process of voluntarily desegregating, through the year that the desegregation process was completed. The desegregation of Killefer School is particularly significant as it took place prior to the *Méndez v. Westminster* ruling in 1947 that required schools in Southern California to desegregate.

The Killefer School is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as an excellent example of a Spanish Colonial Revival schoolhouse in Southern California. It is a rare intact example of a schoolhouse that pre-dates the 1933 Long Beach Earthquake. The period of significance under Criterion C is 1931, the date the school was constructed (Section 8, page 10).

Two classroom buildings located to the north and south of the schoolhouse and one storage shed were constructed between 1980 and 1991 and are identified as non-contributing resources in the designation form.

The LSA Historical Resources Impacts Analysis dated July 2016 identifies a more complete list of character-defining features:

- Spatial relationships between the main schoolhouse and the adjacent residential properties and streets, including the configuration of the landscaped setback and walkways on the east side of the building
- Roughly U-shaped plan with courtyard
- Low-pitched roof with tower and chimney
- Narrow eaves with exposed rafter tails

- Asymmetrical east elevation
- Arched openings and transoms
- Stucco wall cladding
- Octagonal tower (with bell, hardware, round tile vents, and cover-covered wood lattice railing)
- Partially arcaded exterior walkways, including the square posts with chamfered corners and bull-nosed brackets that support the roof over the covered walkway
- Wood-framed, nine paned windows and their arrangement in singles and trios in the east elevation
- Wood-framed, three paned windows, including clerestory windows in the west façade
- Tiled steps and landings on the east elevation
- String course on arched entry in east elevation
- Copper rain gutters and downspouts
- Canale (round tile) vents
- Original carved wood doors
- Configuration of offices, classrooms, hallways, openings, etc.
- Hallway and other interior arches
- Wood floors
- Chalkboard supports and any original, intact chalkboards
- Original built-in cabinets, shelves, closets, etc.
- Exposed rafters in the northeastern classroom and north hallway

The applicant has addressed treatment of the majority of the character-defining features of the building on Sheets 3-5 of Attachment 12: Plans.

EXISTING SITE

The site spans the width of the block between N. Olive and N. Lemon streets. It is developed with a 9,900 square foot Spanish Colonial Revival style elementary school building, constructed in 1931. The building is one story (20 feet tall) with a basement and has an octagonal bell tower over the primary entrance on the east elevation. The schoolhouse has a U-shaped plan, surrounding a courtyard which opened onto a play yard when the school was in use. The courtyard is visible on the west side of the property from N. Lemon Street. A raised, partially arcaded, concrete exterior walkway runs on three sides of the courtyard and serves as a corridor providing access to the classrooms and offices. At the center of the west elevation, facing the courtyard, the corridor expands into the courtyard area to create a raised stage with an arched surround. To the north and south of the schoolhouse are two non-contributing classroom buildings and a storage shed. The remainder of the site is paved for use as a surface parking lot.

EXISTING AREA CONTEXT

The property is located north of the Walnut Street boundary of the National Register and local Old Towne historic districts. To the west are industrial and residential properties, zoned M-2 and R-2-6 respectively. Properties immediately to the west across N. Lemon Street are located within the boundary of the Old Towne historic districts. To the south and east is a mix of single and multi-

family residential properties, zoned R-2-6. Immediately to the north are residential properties and property owned by the Orange Unified School District, which operates the Richland Continuation High School. Property to the north also contains the non-profit Friendly Center and Killefer Park.

The surrounding area is characterized primarily by one story single family residences. The houses are modest with consistent front and side yards setbacks that create the established low-scale residential character of the neighborhood. The majority of the houses were constructed in the first half of the 20th century and reflect a typical detached single-family residential pattern of development from that period. Industrial properties are located to the northwest of the project site, primarily along the railroad corridor. These properties contain one story warehouse and manufacturing buildings. The majority of the buildings are set back from the street and appear to be between 20 and 30 feet tall. Within the streetscape, the buildings appear as low-scale, horizontal developments (See Attachment 3: Context Photographs).

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Orange Municipal Code (OMC) Section 17.10.070 establishes the general criteria the DRC should use when reviewing the project. This section states the following:

The project shall have an internally consistent, integrated design theme, which is reflected in the following elements:

1. **Architectural Features.**
 - a. The architectural features shall reflect a similar design style or period.
 - b. Creative building elements and identifying features should be used to create a high quality project with visual interest and an architectural style.
2. **Landscape.**
 - a. The type, size and location of landscape materials shall support the project's overall design concept.
 - b. Landscaping shall not obstruct visibility of required addressing, nor shall it obstruct the vision of motorists or pedestrians in proximity to the site.
 - c. Landscape areas shall be provided in and around parking lots to break up the appearance of large expanses of hardscape.
3. **Signage.** All signage shall be compatible with the building(s) design, scale, colors, materials and lighting.
4. **Secondary Functional and Accessory Features.** Trash receptacles, storage and loading areas, transformers and mechanical equipment shall be screened in a manner, which is architecturally compatible with the principal building(s).

For the purposes of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the property is considered to be a historical resource, because it is separately designated in the National Register. Under CEQA, the project must be evaluated for potential impacts to the historical resource. A project that may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of the historical resource may have a significant effect on the environment. Projects that are found to be in conformance with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* are generally considered to have a less than significant impact on the historical resource.

The property is located across N. Lemon Street from the boundary of the Old Towne historic districts. Modest single-family residences within the historic districts face the project site. The historic districts are also historical resources for the purposes of CEQA, and the project must be evaluated for potential indirect and cumulative impacts to the character and significance of the historic districts. In addition, separate from the issues of potential impacts to historical resources, the project must be evaluated for potential impacts to the aesthetics of the existing neighborhood.

ANALYSIS/STATEMENT OF THE ISSUES

Staff is requesting the DRC provide comments on the site plan, mass, scale, design and materials of the revised project, the project's conformance with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (Secretary's Standards)*, and its compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood.

At the preliminary review on August 17, 2016, the applicant provided a historical resources impact assessment prepared by LSA Associates, Inc. (LSA), evaluating an earlier version of the project for conformance with the *Secretary's Standards*. LSA determined that the previous project was not in conformance with the *Secretary's Standards* and that the project was a potentially significant impact to the historical resource that could not be mitigated to a less than significant level (see Attachment 9). In summary, the LSA report determined that important historic spaces and spatial relationships, including the courtyard, interior classroom spaces, and the view of the property from N. Lemon Street, would be significantly altered by the new construction. The changes to the historic building, along with the size, scale, proportion and massing of the new buildings, are not compatible with the historic property or the Old Towne Historic District across the street on N. Lemon Street. The applicant has revised the project in an attempt to address the potential historical resources impacts identified by LSA and to respond to the DRC comments from August 17, 2016.

Rehabilitation of the Historic School

During the preliminary review, the DRC commented on the revisions made to the rehabilitation of the historic building. The DRC found the applicant had improved the project by eliminating many of the substantial alterations to the historic school. These include eliminating the proposed loft area within the attic of the historic school; preserving the historic ceilings in the classrooms; retaining the original classroom doors on the corridor and adding a small number of new doors to access the units; eliminating the alterations to the historic courtyard, including the raised outdoor areas and the large openings in the north and south elevations facing the courtyard; and reducing the size of the additions to the north and south sides of the building. In response to DRC comments from August 17 about the new units' interior partitions within the historic classrooms, the applicant has added a note to the plans that the partitions will be glazed below the level of the historic ceiling to retain the sense of the original classroom space.

In a memo dated September 7, 2016 (Attachment 4), LSA briefly reviewed the revised project for conformance with the *Secretary's Standards*. The memo notes that the project revisions incorporate preservation of more character-defining features of the historic school, including the classroom walls, windows, doors and ceilings, original wood floors, and many of the chalkboard supports, which will be incorporated into the new units. The landscape area and walkways on the

east side of the building will also be preserved. Staff concurs that the proposed rehabilitation of the historic building is in conformance with the *Secretary's Standards*.

Site Plan and Compatibility of New Construction with the Neighborhood

At the preliminary review, the Committee recommended that the applicant redesign the project to reduce the impacts of the new construction on the historic site. The Committee recommended orienting the new buildings to reflect the east-west axis of the courtyard wings of the historic school. The DRC suggested that taller buildings could be concentrated on the north side of the property to leave the area directly west of the historic school open to view from N. Lemon Street, reflecting its historic use as a play yard. The Committee noted that the eight foot setback for the new construction on the N. Lemon Street side of the property was not the typical pattern of development in the neighborhood and that the long horizontal elevations on the west side of the property with no articulation of the massing was not compatible with the character of the neighborhood. The Committee also recommended that the security fence on the west side of the property have increased transparency and/or setbacks from the sidewalk, either by incorporating more glass into the fence materials or staggering the distance of the fence from the sidewalk along Lemon Street.

The revised site plan creates a larger view corridor to the courtyard and rear elevation of the historic building from N. Lemon Street. The area west of the historic school courtyard will contain recreational amenities, including basketball and volleyball courts, landscape areas, and the ramp to the underground parking. The buildings flanking this area will be three stories and are oriented east-west on the site to line up with the east-west wings of the historic school. These buildings are approximately 48 feet from the rear of the historic school. The security fencing will incorporate glass at the recreational areas so that the school courtyard will remain visible from the surrounding neighborhood. Sections of the fence have been moved into the site to provide more landscape area next to the sidewalk. The applicant also proposes to use sections of the fence for public art.

The northwest corner of the property will contain a six story building approximately 54 feet tall. The historic school is approximately 20 feet tall with a 33 foot tall tower element. The building will be set back from the N. Lemon Street sidewalk by 8 feet. The building is a large block, organized around a narrow central courtyard. The cladding is a combination of plaster and brick.

LSA finds that the revised site plan improves preservation of the campus character of the historic school. The arrangement of the buildings retains more of the spatial relationship between the courtyard and playground area at the west side of the property and the visual connection with the surrounding neighborhood. LSA also finds that the project would represent “an incremental encroachment of high-density development in an area that has historically been characterized by small single- and multi-family homes.”

Staff agrees that the site plan is an improvement in the preservation of the courtyard and play yard of the historic school. However, staff finds that the six story building is not compatible with the neighborhood of primarily single story small residences (See Attachment 3). The building does not step down toward the street at the interface with the neighborhood and will present a more than 50 foot tall building wall eight feet from the sidewalk. The articulation of the building mass does not reflect the typical pattern of modest houses and consistent front and side yards setbacks that characterize the neighborhood. The building also does not reflect the mass and scale of the larger industrial buildings to the northwest of the property, as it is substantially taller and closer to the

sidewalk than those nearby warehouse and manufacturing buildings. The new construction will substantially change the character of N. Lemon Street and is not compatible with surrounding neighborhood.

Staff requests that the DRC provide comments on the following, along with any other issues related to the proposed project:

- Revisions to the rehabilitation of the historic school, including changes to the classroom interior spaces, courtyard and other historic building features.
- Revisions to the site plan, including the changes to open space and views of the historic property.
- Revisions to the size, mass, scale and design of the new construction, its interface with the surrounding single and multi-family residences and industrial properties, and compatibility with the neighborhood.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Vicinity Map
2. Site Photographs
3. Context Photographs
4. LSA Memorandum, dated September 7, 2016
5. DRC Minutes, August 17, 2016
6. DRC Minutes, September 2, 2015
7. National Register of Historic Places designation for Killefer School
8. National Park Service guidance on rehabilitation and the *Secretary's Standards*
9. LSA Killefer Square Historical Resources Impacts Assessment, July 2016
10. Plans, date stamped September 7, 2016

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