



# *DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE*

## AGENDA ITEM

AGENDA DATE: AUGUST 17, 2016  
TO: Chair Fox and Members of the Design Review Committee  
THRU: Leslie Aranda Roseberry, Planning Manager  
FROM: Marissa Moshier, Associate Planner - Historic Preservation  
SUBJECT: **DRC No. 4807-15 – Killefer Square**

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### **SUMMARY**

The applicant proposes to adaptively reuse a historic school building and construct eight 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 80 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. The applicant is requesting a second preliminary review by the DRC to receive additional feedback on the proposed 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 and conformance with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*.

### **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 review on September 2, 2015

## **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 12 new student housing units and to construct eight new buildings containing 73 apartment style student housing units. Since the previous DRC preliminary review, the applicant has expanded the project area to include an additional 0.12 acres on the north side of the property, for a total project area of 1.82 acres. 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 six housing units.
  - Existing doors to the exterior corridor around the courtyard will be retained and additional doors will be added to access the units.
  - Construction of additions to the north and south side of the building.
  - Since the previous DRC review, the applicant has eliminated or reduced the scope of the following project elements:
    - Eliminated addition of a new dormer on the roof of the west elevation facing the courtyard.
    - Reduced the alterations to the courtyard by eliminating the raised, trellised outdoor areas.
    - Eliminated large openings on the north and south courtyard elevations.
    - Reduced the size of additions to the north and south sides of the building.
- Construction of eight new buildings, containing 73 apartment-style student housing units with one to four bedrooms.
  - The new buildings on the interior of the site are 38 feet tall, containing 3 stories with a loft. The new buildings on the perimeter are 29 feet tall, containing 2 stories with a loft. The historic school is 20 feet tall.

- The new buildings are designed with a smooth plaster finish, standing seam metal roof, and multi-light windows.
- In response to DRC comments about the view of the historic building from N. Lemon Street, the applicant has included a two-story tall view corridor through the new buildings and aligned with the historic school's courtyard.
- Construction of two levels of subterranean parking, providing 200 spaces, under the new buildings.

## **NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES DESIGNATION**

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).

The following exterior character-defining features are called out in the designation form:

- Low-pitched roof
- Eaves with little overhang
- Arches above doors
- Terra cotta tile decorative vents
- Octagonal tower
- Stucco-clad exterior walls
- Asymmetrical façade
- Partially arcaded exterior walkway

Interior character-defining features that are called out include:

- Hallway arches
- Exposed rafters in northeastern classroom and north hallway

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.

### **EXISTING SITE**

The site spans the full 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 an interior courtyard. 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 northern 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.

### **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.

### **ANALYSIS/STATEMENT OF THE ISSUES**

Staff is requesting the DRC provide comments on the site plan, mass, scale, design and materials of the proposed project and on the project's conformance with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (Secretary's Standards)*. In addition to the ten standards for rehabilitation of historic properties, the National Park Service (NPS) provides guidance on interpreting the Standards for specific project types. These include "Interpreting The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation" (ITS) bulletins, which provide examples of compatible and incompatible treatments to historic buildings under the *Secretary's Standards*. The NPS publications are provided as Attachment 4 to the staff report.

Following the first DRC preliminary review in September 2015, the applicant engaged LSA Associates, Inc. (LSA) to evaluate the proposed project for conformance with the *Secretary's Standards*. LSA determined that the proposed 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 5). 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 is not compatible with the historic property or the Old Towne Historic District across the street on N. Lemon.

The LSA report recommends:

Because the resource derives its significance from its design and function as a school, in order to reduce the potential impacts the project would need to be significantly redesigned to retain the spaces and spatial relationships that characterize the property as a school. [...], the property has historically been open and visible from North Lemon Street; therefore,

any design change should incorporate more open space on the west side of the School and a wider, less-obstructed view corridor from North Lemon Street. The east side of the School, including the current configuration of the landscaped setback, walkways, and entrances, should be preserved and/or restored to the 1931-1944 appearance. These types of design changes would preserve the property's ability to convey its historic use as a school from both of its historic vantage points (North Lemon Street and Olive Street). The interior spaces that define the building as a school also need to be preserved as much as possible (pg. 36).

Staff concurs with the analysis of the project in the LSA report and recommends a redesign of the mass and scale of the proposed new construction to bring the project into conformance with the *Secretary's Standards*.

In response to the LSA report, the applicant has since revised the proposed project to lessen the impacts to the materials and features of the historic resource itself. Changes include eliminating the proposed loft area within the attic of the historic school and the dormer on the west elevation roof. This will allow preservation of the historic ceilings in the classrooms. Existing classroom doors on the corridor will be retained and a small number of new doors will be added to access the units. This approach limits the removal of spaces and materials that are important to the character of the historic school. The applicant has also eliminated many of the alterations to the historic courtyard, including the raised outdoor areas covered with trellises and the large openings in the north and south elevations facing the courtyard. The size of the additions to the north and south sides of the building has also been reduced.

These alterations reduce the impacts to the historic materials of the building; however, the size, mass and scale of the proposed new construction continues to be a substantial change to the character and spatial relationships within the historic site and the surrounding properties. The National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services provides specific guidance on new construction within the boundaries of historic properties. Generally, the design, density and placement of new construction should respect the overall character of the site. This includes:

- Related new construction – including buildings, driveways, parking lots, landscape improvements and other new features – must not alter the historic character of a property. A property's historic function must be evident even if there is a change of use.
- The location of new construction should be considered carefully in order to follow the setbacks of historic buildings and to avoid blocking their primary elevations. New construction should be placed away from or at the side or rear of historic buildings and must avoid obscuring, damaging, or destroying character-defining features of these buildings or the site.
- Protecting the historic setting and context of a property, including the degree of open space and building density, must always be considered when planning new construction on an historic site. This entails identifying the formal or informal arrangements of buildings on the site, and whether they have a distinctive urban, suburban, or rural character. For example, a historic building traditionally surrounded by open space must not be crowded with dense development.

- As with new additions, the massing, size, scale, and architectural features of new construction on the site of a historic building must be compatible with those of the historic building. When visible and in close proximity to historic buildings, the new construction must be subordinate to these buildings. New construction should also be distinct from the old and must not attempt to replicate historic buildings elsewhere on site and to avoid creating a false sense of historic development.
- The limitations on the size, scale, and design of new construction may be less critical the farther it is located from historic buildings (“New Construction within the Boundaries of Historic Properties,” Attachment 4).

The applicant proposes construction of eight new buildings containing apartment-style student housing. The maximum height of the buildings (38 feet) is positioned at the center of the development. The buildings step down to 29 feet on the perimeter at the interface with the surrounding neighborhood. The historic schoolhouse is 20 feet tall with a 33 foot tall tower element. The new buildings surround the historic schoolhouse at the rear and north side. To the west, the new construction is 20 feet, wall-to-wall, from the historic building. A two-story tall view corridor through the new construction is aligned with the courtyard of the school and will provide limited views of the historic building from N. Lemon Street. The proposed buildings have a smooth stucco finish and gable roofs covered with standing seam metal. The smooth stucco finish is similar to the finish of the historic schoolhouse. The large multi-light windows are intended to reflect the scale and appearance of the historic windows in the schoolhouse.

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

- Site plan and density, including distances of new buildings from the historic schoolhouse and the changes to open space and views of the historic property.
- Mass and scale of the new buildings, including the interface with the historic building and with the surrounding neighborhood of single and multi-family residences and institutional properties.
- Alterations to the historic school, including changes to the classroom interior spaces, courtyard and other historic building features.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

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

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