



DATE ISSUED: November 18, 2014

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board
Agenda of December 4, 2014

SUBJECT: ITEM #5 – AC Hotel (743 Fifth Avenue) – Planned Development Permit / Gaslamp Quarter Development Permit / Conditional Use Permit / Neighborhood Use Permit No. 2103-35

APPLICANT: Briad Group, LLC

LOCATION: 743 Fifth Avenue, San Diego, California 92101, Council District 3

DESCRIPTION: Consider recommending Planning Commission approval of the permits related to the historical aspects of the Project.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

That the Historical Resources Board (HRB) recommends that the Planning Commission approves Gaslamp Quarter Development Permit (GQDP) No. 2013-35.

BACKGROUND

San Diego Municipal Code (SDMC) Section 157.0203(a)(2) requires review and a recommendation from the HRB to the Civic San Diego (“CivicSD”) President (“President”) prior to the President making a decision on a GQDP for building heights in excess of 60 feet and up to 75 feet according to SDMC Section 157.0302(a)(3):

When the HRB is taking action on a recommendation to a decision-maker, the Board shall make a recommendation on only those aspects of the matter that relate to the historical aspects of the project. The Board’s recommendation action(s) shall relate to the cultural resources section, recommendations, findings and mitigation measures of the final environmental document, the Site Development Permit findings for historical purposes, and/or the project’s compliance with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties. If the Board desires to recommend the inclusion of additional conditions, the motion should include a request for staff to incorporate permit conditions to capture the Board's recommendations when the project moves forward to the decision maker.

Due to the Applicant’s request for deviations from the SDMC parking standards to permit substandard parking spaces and drive aisles, and to provide vehicle parking within the drive aisles served solely by valet parking service, this Project requires approval of a Process Four PDP. Due to the inclusion of a request for both indoor and outdoor live entertainment use in this

Project, the Applicant must also obtain a CUP (Process Three); and due to the request for an outdoor use area (rooftop deck) and sidewalk cafe, the Applicant must obtain a NUP (Process Two). Per SDMC Section 112.0103, when an Applicant applies for more than one permit for a single development, the applications shall be consolidated for processing and shall be reviewed by a single decision maker. The decision maker shall act on the consolidated application at the highest level of authority for that development, and the findings required for approval of each permit shall be considered individually. The final decision-maker for this Project will be the Planning Commission in accordance with a Process Four.

The Project site is located at 743 Fifth Avenue (Not Contributing) and 744 Sixth Avenue (Contributing) within the Gaslamp Historic District (HRB Site #127), and is a contributing resource to that district, listed as HRB Site #127-075. As a contributing resource, all work on the property requires a building permit and must be reviewed by Plan-Historic staff for compliance with the City's Historic Resources Regulations (SDMC Ch 14, Art 3 Div 2); the Gaslamp Quarter Planned District Design Guidelines ("Design Guidelines"); and the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards. Projects which do not comply with the above Standards, Guidelines and Criteria will require a Site Development Permit (Process Four) in accordance with SDMC Section 143.0210(e)(2).

The Project site is located within the Gaslamp Quarter Planned District (GQPD) which is considered San Diego's premier entertainment destination. The Gaslamp Quarter is primarily a mixed-use neighborhood and allows a variety of land uses including hotel and visitor accommodations, active commercial uses on the ground floor and office and residential uses in the upper floors of buildings. The GQPD permits 100 percent commercial projects, including hotels as proposed for this Project.

In the 1980's the Gaslamp Quarter Planned District ("Gaslamp Quarter") was listed as a historical district on the National Register of Historic Places. The Gaslamp Quarter extends from the south side of Broadway to Harbor Drive and from the east side of Fourth Avenue to the west side of Sixth Avenue. Also included is the west side of Fourth Avenue (to the mid-block property line) between Market and Island Avenue. The Gaslamp Quarter contains the highest concentration of historically significant commercial structures in the City of San Diego. Therefore, in order to ensure that the historical character of the Gaslamp Quarter is retained, development proposals are subject to the design and development criteria of the Gaslamp Quarter Planned District Ordinance (GQPDO) and the Design Guidelines.

The Project site is a generally flat 11,500 square-foot premises that is currently occupied by a two-story building constructed on the site in 1998 that is currently occupied by T.G.I. Fridays and McFaddens Restaurant and Saloon. The northern boundary of the site is adjacent to the historic Pierce-Field building and the southern boundary is adjacent to the non-historic Gaslamp Reading Theaters building. The remainder of the block contains a variety of mid to low scale commercial/retail buildings.

This Project proposes demolition of the existing non-historical structure while maintaining an existing historical wall on the east side of the property in the Gaslamp Quarter Planned District,

and construction of a seven-story, 75-foot tall full-service 119 guest room hotel development with approximately 5,000 sq.ft. of commercial restaurant space on the ground level facing Fifth Avenue, an approximately 5,000 sq.ft. nightclub and lounge in a below-grade basement, an approximately 3,500 sq.ft. roof-top pool deck and lounge, all with 36 valet-service on-site parking spaces.

ANALYSIS

The Project's original design as presented to Plan-Historic staff during a single disciplinary preliminary review was not determined to be consistent with the Gaslamp Quarter Planned District Design Guidelines or the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards; requiring the following revisions:

1. The facade locate on Sixth Avenue is a contributing resource to the Gaslamp Historic District and as such should be preserved. The upper floors of the proposed new construction should be stepped back from this facade to allow for distinction of the historic facade. The belt course and the cornice should be maintained. The store front design should be evaluated to be more consistent with the original design.
2. The street level facade on Fifth Avenue should have a more unified design consistent with other buildings in the district. Historically, storefronts in the same building had a cohesive element. The consistency could be accomplished through a unified transom or a similar element. It is difficult to discern the design intent in the photo simulation. Provide an elevation of the front facade clearly indicating materials.
3. Historically, windows weren't large vertical sections of glass. The various floors should be broken in between the windows to represent a more consistent appearance.
4. The use of a metal and glass roll up garage door on a historic facade is not appropriate. A different type of door should be considered on Sixth Avenue.
5. Plans should indicate the work proposed for the existing facade on Sixth Avenue. There are existing double hung windows and transom windows in place that should be addressed. Additionally, any re-pointing should be noted in the plans.

This Project was reviewed by the Design Assistance Subcommittee ("Subcommittee") of the HRB on September 3, 2014, with the Applicant seeking direction specifically on the proposed facade rehabilitation along Sixth Avenue. The Subcommittee made several recommendation regarding treatment of the Sixth Avenue façade which were incorporated into the Project's design for a revised Project review submittal.

Plan-Historic staff has evaluated the revised submittal and has found that the Applicant has addressed all five items sufficiently to recommend approval of the Project as currently proposed. In addition, Plan-Historic staff provided three additional design comments or considerations following the latest Project review:

1. The new construction on Sixth Avenue has been set back 5 feet from the historic facade. Adequacy of a setback for new construction is determined on a case by case basis. In this instance, since only the facade of the building is remaining (the bulk of the building was approved for removal in the 1990s by the HRB), the 5 foot setback is adequate and provides delineation between existing and new construction.
2. Based on the limited information provided on renderings, the basic design seems to be consistent with the Standards. However, it is difficult to determine the height of the bulkhead on Fifth Avenue, the manner in which the windows operate on the Fifth Avenue storefront and the actual look of the garage door on Sixth Avenue. These items will need to be reviewed in greater detail. Scaled elevations and manufacturer's spec. sheets for the windows/door would be helpful. This level of information will be required at the building permit stage.
3. The northern wall of the Sixth Avenue facade is shown as having a mural, as proposed by the Design Assistance Subcommittee. The proposed mural for this location will need to be discussed in greater detail with HRB staff and CivicSD staff. This level of information will be required at the building permit stage.

CivicSD staff had similar concerns as Plan-Historic staff regarding the newly-proposed mural, as well as whether the proposed windows comply with the GQPD Design Guidelines. The proposed mural has since been redesigned per staff recommendation to include an historic black-and-white photograph depicting this particular section of the Gaslamp Quarter during its Period of Significance, which both Plan-Historic and CivicSD agree is a good solution.

CivicSD staff, however, continues to be concerned over the design for the top floor windows along the Sixth Avenue elevation regarding compliance with the Design Guidelines "Facade Characteristics" requiring:

All windows above the street level shall have a dominant vertical proportion. Window openings shall be stacked and symmetrically arranged on the facade. Building bays and details shall respect the existing tall, narrow profile and symmetrical arrangement of those in historical buildings of the District.

The seventh-floor band of windows does not appear to comply with this requirement. Although set back from the lower street wall an additional 10 feet from the already set back upper streetwall, which in turn is set back from the historic facade by 5 feet for the total required 15 feet, it still presents a potentially non-conforming element visible to the public right-of-way. Staff is requesting input from the HRB regarding this outstanding design issue.

The applicant has recently revised the materials along the Fifth Avenue elevation, adding vertical sections of thin brick veneer spanning three stories (third through fifth) above the natural smooth stone base cladding on the first two floors. The remainder of the building design remains consistent to the previous submittals discussed above.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

This Project's design and compliance with the GQPDO, the Guidelines, and the Downtown Community Plan as a whole will be reviewed by the Downtown Community Planning Council (DCPC) Pre-Design Subcommittee tentatively scheduled for December 1, 2014 for recommendation to the DCPC on December 10, 2014 for recommendation to the Planning Commission in early 2015.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Development downtown is covered under the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the San Diego DCP, CCPDO, and 10th Amendment to the Centre City Redevelopment Plan, certified by the Former Redevelopment Agency ("Former Agency") on March 14, 2006 (Resolution R-04001) and subsequent addenda to the FEIR certified by the Former Agency on August 3, 2007 (Former Agency Resolution R-04193), April 21, 2010 (Former Agency Resolutions R-04508 and R-04510), August 3, 2010 (Former Agency Resolution R-04544) and certified by the City Council on February 12, 2014 (City Council Resolution R-308724). The FEIR is a "Program EIR" prepared in compliance with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15168. An FEIR Consistency Evaluation ("Evaluation") will be prepared in accordance with suggested best practices outlined in CEQA Guidelines Section 15168. If the Evaluation concludes that the environmental impacts of the project were adequately addressed in the FEIR and if the project is within the scope of the development program described in the FEIR, then no further environmental documentation will be required under CEQA.

CONCLUSION

Per SDMC Section 157.0302(a)(3), Plan-Historic and CivicSD staff are requesting that the HRB recommend that the Planning Commission approve GQDP No. 2013-35, pending resolution of the seventh-floor window design issue, and with respect to only those facets of the Project proposal that relate to the historical aspects of the Project and finding that the Project complies with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties.

Respectfully submitted:



Scott Glazebrook
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Concurred by:



Brad Richter
Assistant Vice President, Planning, CivicSD

Attachments: A – Plan-Historic Preliminary Review
Basic Concept/Schematic Drawings

