

DESIGN REVIEW NARRATIVE FOR NEW DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT

Development Statement from Architect:

- *The building is heavily articulated on three sides with both vertical and horizontal undulations. On First Street, the three projecting gables follow the angle of the street as they step away from the Lyell Street intersection heading north. The upper floor is set back from the lower floors for additional relief. This is especially noticeable as the building turns the corner from First to Lyell Street where the third floor is pulled back and wrapped with a band of windows. All four corners of the building are accented with the same window treatment. The Alley elevation has a recessed central loggia on the top floor framed by gabled pavilions at either end which helps to break up the façade as well as the roofline. The majority of the north side of the building is 2 to 3 feet off the property line. Rather than a blank wall there are 5 “false windows” that match the look and feel of the other windows in the building. The center of the elevation is recessed from the property line to allow 6 “real windows” in secondary rooms.*
- *All the building’s exterior walls are 8” thick to allow deep-set windows and dramatic shadow lines. The windows themselves are casements with true divided lights.*
- *The sloping tile roof forms a parapet around a well that hides the mechanical units and solar panels from the street or neighboring views.*
- *All parking is shielded from the public in a below-ground parking garage. Access to the garage is by a ramp off the alley at the northeast corner of the site. This is furthest corner of the property away from Lyell Street so as to cause the least interference with the intersection. As designed, the parking is in a three level mechanical puzzle that will call the cars up automatically with each space having a potential charger. In addition, the project will provide an alternative of a conventional two-level garage.*

General Design Review Findings (Section 14.78.060)

- A. The proposal meets the goals, policies and objectives of the general plan and any specific plan, design guidelines and ordinance design criteria adopted for the specific district or area.

RESPONSE: *According to the Peer Review from Larry Cannon of the Cannon Design Group (the “Cannon Letter”), “The following applicable Zoning Code Sections, plans and guidelines apply to this review:*

Downtown Design Guidelines

Commercial/Multi-Family Design Findings (Zoning Code Section 14.78.060)

CD/R3 District Design Controls (Section 14.52.110)”

According to the Cannon Letter, “The proposed project appears to meet the required findings of the Commercial/Multi-Family Design Findings and the CD/R3 District Design Controls which are less specific than the Downtown Design Guidelines. It also appears to be sensitive to the goals, objectives and guidelines of the Downtown Design Guidelines.”

- B. The proposal has architectural integrity and has an appropriate relationship with other structures in the immediate area in terms of height, bulk and design.

RESPONSE: *According to the Cannon Letter, the project is well designed with a recognizable traditional architectural style and an abundance of details authentic to the architectural style. The facades are articulated with*

both horizontal and vertical off-sets to break up the mass of the building and relate to the smaller scale adjacent buildings as called for in the Downtown Design Guidelines.

Of course, many of the surrounding properties are proposed to be redeveloped at heights well in excess of the 35-foot proposed height of the project, and with flat roofs that allow the actual building to be taller (i.e. not measured to the midpoint of the roof – measuring the project to the flat part of the roof would make the building approximately 32.5-foot tall).

- C. Building mass is articulated to relate to the human scale, both horizontally and vertically. Building elevations have variation and depth, and avoid large blank wall surfaces. Residential or mixed-use residential projects incorporate elements that signal habitation, such as identifiable entrances, stairs, porches, bays and balconies.

RESPONSE: *As further discussed below, the design team focused on designing the building from outside to inside, which included articulating the building from a pedestrian and vehicular perspective, both horizontally and vertically. There are a number of features that relate to a pedestrian scale, including the significant amount of publicly visible landscaping in the front and rear 10' setbacks (versus landscaping only located in privately visible front and rear yards in many similar projects constructed or proposed along First Street). Building elevations have variation and depth, and avoid large blank wall surfaces. In addition, the significant setbacks of the 3rd floor, the balconies on the 2nd and 3rd floor, and the exterior stairway along Lyell, create variation and depth. In addition, the balcony and window elements, the entries on both public streets, and the open stairway along Lyell, together combine to signal habitation.*

- D. Exterior materials and finishes convey high quality, integrity, permanence and durability, and materials are used effectively to define building elements such as base, body, parapets, bays, arcades and structural elements. Materials, finishes, and colors have been used in a manner that serves to reduce the perceived appearance of height, bulk and mass, and are harmonious with other structures in the immediate area.

RESPONSE: *The proposed materials and finishes are consistent with the highest quality materials and finishes of the newer residential buildings in downtown. The palette is smooth stucco, wood, stone, tile, custom wrought iron. According to the Cannon Letter, “The materials palette is consistent the newer residential buildings in downtown.” The contrasting colors will create visual interest and a feeling of high –quality. Please see Sheet A4.3 and Sheet A7.0 for images of the planned materials and colors.*

- E. Landscaping is generous and inviting, and landscape and hardscape features are designed to complement the building and parking areas, and to be integrated with the building architecture and the surrounding streetscape. Landscaping includes substantial street tree canopy, either in the public right-of-way or within the project frontage.

RESPONSE: *There are a number of features which relate to a pedestrian scale, including the significant amount of publicly visible landscaping in the front and rear 10' setbacks (versus only in privately visible front and rear yards in many similar projects constructed or proposed along First Street). Please see Sheet L1.01 and Sheet L2.01 for images of the planned materials and colors.*

- F. Signage is designed to complement the building architecture in terms of style, materials, colors and proportions.

RESPONSE: As a residential building, signage will be limited to “425 First Street”. The location, font and size will be provided to the City for Staff review at a later date.

- G. Mechanical equipment is screened from public view and the screening is designed to be consistent with the building architecture in form, material and detailing.

RESPONSE: The 5-foot tall parapet wall will completely shield the solar panels and the air-conditioning units from public view.

- H. Service, trash and utility areas are screened from public view, or are enclosed in structures that are consistent with the building architecture in materials and detailing.

RESPONSE: The trash and utility rooms are located in the below ground parking garage. The trash bins will be brought up by a “conciierge trash service” to a trash pad located in the building setback area along the alley for collection by the trash company on trash collection days, and returned to the trash room in the below ground parking garage the same day.

CD/R3 District Design Controls (Section 14.52.110)

- A. Reduction of apparent size and bulk:

1. As a general principle, building surfaces should be relieved with a change of wall plane that provides strong shadow and visual interest.

RESPONSE: According to the Cannon Letter, the project is well designed with a recognizable traditional architectural style and an abundance of details authentic to the architectural style. The facades are articulated with both horizontal and vertical off-sets to break up the mass of the building and relate to the smaller scale adjacent buildings as called for in the Downtown Design Guidelines.

In addition, the significant setbacks of the 3rd floor, the balconies on the 2nd and 3rd floor, and the exterior stairway along Lyell, create variation and depth. In addition, the balcony and window elements, the entries on both public streets, and the open stairway along Lyell, together combine to signal habitation.

2. Every building over seventy-five (75) feet wide should have its perceived height and bulk reduced by dividing the building mass into smaller-scale components by:
 - i. A change of plane;
 - ii. A projection or recess;
 - iii. Varying cornice or roof lines;
 - iv. Other similar means.

RESPONSE: As noted above, according to the Cannon Letter, the project is well designed with a recognizable traditional architectural style and an abundance of details authentic to the architectural style. The facades are articulated with both horizontal and vertical off-sets to break up the mass of the building and relate to the smaller scale adjacent buildings as called for in the Downtown Design Guidelines.

In addition, the significant setbacks of the 3rd floor, the balconies on the 2nd and 3rd floor, and the exterior stairway along Lyell, create variation and depth. In addition, the balcony and window elements, the entries

on both public streets, and the open stairway along Lyell, together combine to enhance how the project is perceived on a human scale.

3. The proportions of building elements, especially those at ground level, should be kept close to human scale by using recesses, courtyards, entries, or outdoor spaces along the perimeter of the building to define the underlying fifty-foot front lot frontage.

RESPONSE: *As noted above, there are a number of features which relate to a human scale, including the significant amount of publicly visible landscaping in the front and rear 10' setbacks (versus only in privately visible front and rear yards in many similar projects constructed or proposed along First Street). Please see Sheet L1.01 and Sheet L2.01 for images of the planned materials and colors. In addition, the significant setbacks of the 3rd floor, the balconies on the 2nd and 3rd floor, and the exterior stairway along Lyell, create variation and depth. In addition, the balcony and window elements, the entries on both public streets, and the open stairway along Lyell, together combine to enhance how the project is perceived on a human scale.*

4. Rooftop equipment shall be concealed from view and/or integrated within the architecture of the building.

RESPONSE: *As noted above, the 5-foot tall parapet wall will completely shield the solar panels and the air-conditioning units from public view.*

5. Windows should be inset generously from the building wall to create shade and shadow detail; the minimum inset shall be three inches.

RESPONSE: *The wood / metal clad windows are inset by at least 3". Please see Sheet A4.3.*

- B. The primary access for all buildings shall be directly to the street.

RESPONSE: *Both the primary access (First Street – center) and the secondary access (Lyell Street – center) are directly to the street.*

- C. Consideration should be given to the relationship of the project and its location in the downtown to the implementation of goals and objectives of the downtown design plan, revaluation of design approval shall consider one or more of the following factors:

1. The project location as an entry, edge, or core site;
2. The ability to contribute to the creation of open space on-site or in designated areas;
3. Enhancement of the pedestrian environment through the use of pathways, plantings, trees, paving, benches or other amenities;
4. Building facade improvements including, paint, signage, service areas, windows and other features;
5. On-site or off-site parking improvements;
6. Public or private landscape improvements.

RESPONSE:

1. The project location as an entry, edge, or core site; *[Not applicable.]*
2. The ability to contribute to the creation of open space on-site or in designated areas; *[As noted above, 10' front and rear setbacks create open space onsite.]*
3. Enhancement of the pedestrian environment through the use of pathways, plantings, trees, paving, benches or other amenities; *[As noted above, there are a number of features which relate to a pedestrian scale, including the significant amount of publicly visible landscaping in the front and rear 10' setbacks (versus only in privately visible front and rear yards in many similar projects constructed or proposed along First Street). Please see Sheet L1.01 and Sheet L2.01 for images of the planned materials and colors.]*
4. Building facade improvements including, paint, signage, service areas, windows and other features; *[As noted above, according to the Cannon Letter, the project is well designed with a recognizable traditional architectural style and an abundance of details authentic to the architectural style. The facades are articulated with both horizontal and vertical off-sets to break up the mass of the building and relate to the smaller scale adjacent buildings as called for in the Downtown Design Guidelines.]*
5. On-site or off-site parking improvements; *[All parking is below ground.]*
6. Public or private landscape improvements. *[As noted above, there are a number of features which relate to a pedestrian scale, including the significant amount of publicly visible landscaping in the front and rear 10' setbacks (versus only in privately visible front and rear yards in many similar projects constructed or proposed along First Street). Please see Sheet L1.01 and Sheet L2.01 for images of the planned materials and colors.]*

D. Opaque, reflective, or dark tinted glass should not be used on the ground floor elevation. With the exception of ground floor residential units, sixty (60) percent of the ground floor elevation should be transparent window surface.

RESPONSE: *The window and door glass on entire building, including the ground floor, will be transparent. The ground floor is solely residential units.*

E. Courtyards should be partially visible from the street or linked to the street by a clear circulation element such as an open passage or covered arcade.

RESPONSE: *Not applicable. Please note that the project added an exterior stair on the Lyell Street side solely for visual interest.*

F. Rooftop mechanical, venting, and/or exhausting equipment must be within the height limit and screened architecturally from public view, including views from adjacent buildings located at the same level.

RESPONSE: *As noted above, the 5-foot tall parapet wall will completely shield the solar panels and the air-conditioning units from public view.*

Downtown Design Guidelines – First Street District (Pages 65-70)

5.1 PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENT

The First Street District is spread along First Street which is more vehicle-oriented than the remainder of Downtown Los Altos, and has more surface parking with limited landscaping than most other areas. Nevertheless, this district is very much a part of the downtown village. These guidelines are intended to allow larger buildings and on-site parking while doing so in a manner that reinforces Downtown Los Altos' village scale and character.

5.1.1 Minimize the visual impact of parking

- a) Underground or screened roof parking is encouraged on larger parcels.
- b) Provide a landscape buffer between street front sidewalks and any adjacent parking lot. Per the zoning code, the minimum width of this buffer must be 5 feet, unless less is allowed by a variance. When lesser widths are allowed for existing parking lot improvements, some buffering is still required. One approach to adding visual buffering by a low wall is shown below.

***RESPONSE:** The parking is underground. There is no adjacent parking lot.*

5.1.2 Provide pedestrian linkages between street front sidewalks and building entries

- a) Building entries facing First Street are strongly encouraged. For larger buildings where entries are set back on a facade facing a parking lot, provide a strong sidewalk connection with landscaping on both sides from the street front to the entry.

***RESPONSE:** The primary building entry faces First Street (and the secondary building entry faces Lyell Street).*

5.1.3 Provide landscape buffers between parking lots and pedestrian areas at buildings

- a) Building fronts are expected to be as active and attractive as those in the Downtown Core District, and to be buffered from parked cars. Landscaping and, where appropriate, trees should be used to buffer pedestrian areas. Alternatively, arcades and planters at the building may be used for this purpose. Examples of these two approaches are shown to the left.

***RESPONSE:** As noted above, there are a number of landscape, landscape planters, street furniture and enhanced pedestrian walkways that enhance the pedestrian experience along the First Street and Lyell Street frontages. These features, which relate to a human scale, include the significant amount of publicly visible landscape / landscape planters in the front (and the rear) 10' setbacks. Please see Sheet L1.01 and Sheet L2.01 for images of the planned materials and colors.*

5.1.4 Provide special paving for parking lots immediately accessible from the street

- a) Parking areas which are adjacent to street front sidewalks and with perpendicular parking spaces directly accessible from the street drive lane are strongly discouraged. For existing parking areas like this that are being upgraded, provide a distinction on the paving color and texture between the parking surface and the adjacent sidewalk and street paving.

***RESPONSE:** Not applicable. Below ground parking.*

5.1.5 Provide pedestrian walkways through large parking lots

- a) Dedicated walks through parking lots will improve pedestrian safety and enhance the shopping and business patronage experience. Walkways should be reinforced with edge landscaping and with textured and/or permeable paving where they cross parking drive aisles. One example is shown in the upper right of this page.

RESPONSE: *Not applicable. Below ground parking.*

5.1.6 Provide pedestrian amenities.

Amenities may include: Benches; Fountains; Planted areas; Rain gardens and other rainwater infiltration features; Special decorative paving; Potted flowers and plants; Public art; and/or Waste receptacles.

RESPONSE: *As noted above, there are a number of landscape, landscape planters, street furniture and enhanced pedestrian walkways that enhance the pedestrian experience along the First Street and Lyell Street frontages. These features, which relate to a human scale, include the significant amount of publicly visible landscape / landscape planters in the front (and the rear) 10' setbacks. Please see Sheet L1.01 and Sheet L2.01 for images of the planned materials and colors.*

5.1.7 Integrate ground floor residential uses with the streetscape

- a) Set structures back a minimum of 10 feet from the street property line. Stairs and entry porches may encroach into this setback up to the property line.
- b) Soft landscaping is required for a minimum of 60% of the front setback area.

RESPONSE: *As noted above, the building is set back the required 10' from the front and rear property lines. Also, as noted above, there are a number of features that integrate the ground floor residential use with the streetscape, and which relate to a human scale. The soft landscaping is the required 60% minimum in the front setback, and includes a significant amount of publicly visible landscape / landscape planters (versus only in privately visible front and rear yards in many similar projects constructed or proposed along First Street). Please see Sheet L1.01 and Sheet L2.01 for images of the planned materials and colors.*

5.2 ARCHITECTURE

Building uses and sizes will vary more in the First Street District than elsewhere in the downtown. The goal of these guidelines is to accommodate this wide diversity of size and use while maintaining a village scale and character that is complementary to the downtown core. The photographs shown on this and the following page are examples of more vehicle-oriented buildings that include forms and details that are sensitive to village scale and character.

5.2.1 Design to a village scale and character

- a) Avoid large box-like structures.
- b) Break larger buildings into smaller scale elements.
- c) Provide special design articulation and detail for building facades located adjacent to street frontages.
- d) Keep focal point elements small in scale.
- e) Utilize materials that are common in the downtown core.
- f) Avoid designs that appear to seek to be prominently seen from Foothill Expressway and/or San Antonio Road in favor of designs that focus on First Street, and are a part of the village environment.
- g) Provide substantial small-scale details.

- h) Integrate landscaping into building facades in a manner similar to the Downtown Core District (See DDG pages 28-29).

RESPONSE: *According to the Cannon Letter, “The proposed project appears to meet the required findings of the Commercial/Multi-Family Design Findings and the CD/R3 District Design Controls which are less specific than the Downtown Design Guidelines. It also appears to be sensitive to the goals, objectives and guidelines of the Downtown Design Guidelines.”*

5.2.2 Design structures to be compatible with adjacent existing buildings

- a) Buildings adjacent to the Downtown Core District should be designed in form, material, and details similar to those nearby along Main and State Streets.
- b) Projects adjacent to existing residential neighborhoods should draw upon residential forms and details to create a smaller grain design fabric that is compatible with the residential buildings.

RESPONSE:

- a) Buildings adjacent to the Downtown Core District should be designed in form, material, and details similar to those nearby along Main and State Streets. *[Not applicable]*
- b) Projects adjacent to existing residential neighborhoods should draw upon residential forms and details to create a smaller grain design fabric that is compatible with the residential buildings. *[Not applicable]*

According to the Cannon Letter, the project is well designed with a recognizable traditional architectural style and an abundance of details authentic to the architectural style. The facades are articulated with both horizontal and vertical off-sets to break up the mass of the building and relate to the smaller scale adjacent buildings as called for in the Downtown Design Guidelines.

5.3 LANDSCAPE

Substantial landscaping is expected in the First Street District to ensure that the area becomes a visual part of the larger downtown village.

RESPONSE: *As noted above, the building is set back the required 10’ from the front and rear property lines, which areas contain substantial landscaping. The soft landscaping is the required 60% minimum in the front setback, and includes a significant amount of publicly visible landscape / landscape planters (versus only in privately visible front and rear yards in many similar projects constructed or proposed along First Street). Please see Sheet L1.01 and Sheet L2.01 for images of the planned materials and colors.*

5.3.1 Provide substantial landscaping adjacent to residential neighborhoods

RESPONSE: *Not applicable.*

5.3.2 Landscape Foothill Expressway edges with shrubbery and trees

RESPONSE: *Not applicable.*

5.3.3 Add substantial landscaping in all parking lots

- a) Provide landscaping equal to or greater than the requirements set forth in the Los Altos Zoning Code.
- b) Tree landscaping should be provided to create an orchard canopy effect in surface parking lots with more than one drive aisle. Utilize landscape fingers placed parallel to the parking spaces to break up expanses of parking lot paving. Space the islands with intervals not exceeding 6 parking spaces in length.
- c) Utilize hedges, trees, and other landscaping between facing parking spaces as shown in the example to the left.

RESPONSE: *Not applicable. Below ground parking.*

5.3.4 Add street trees along all parcel street frontages

RESPONSE: *Twelve (12) 24-inch box trees (minimum) will be installed on the three street frontages – First Street, Lyell Street, and the alley between First Street and Second Street.*

5.4 SIGNAGE

The Downtown Core District signage guidelines apply to all signs in the First Street District. Ground signs and freestanding signs may also be allowed at the discretion of the city. (See the guidelines on pages 60-61 for these two sign types).

RESPONSE: *There will not be any “ground signs” or “freestanding signs”. As a residential building, signage will be limited to “425 First Street”. The location, font and size will be provided to the City for Staff review at a later date.*