



Architectural Review Board Report

Architectural Review Board Meeting: February 18, 2020

Agenda Item: 7.2

To: Architectural Review Board

From: Scott Albright, Senior Planner

Cc: Stephanie Reich, AIA, LEED AP, Design & Historic Preservation Planner
James Combs, ARB Liaison
Gina Szilak, ARB Liaison

Subject: 19ARB-0560 to approve the building design, colors, materials, landscape plans, sign plans, and a sign program for a new eight-story (84 feet), 89,593 square-foot, mixed-use building with 140 residential units, ground floor commercial space, and a three-level subterranean parking garage.

Address: 601 Colorado Avenue
Applicant: WNMS Communities

Recommended Action

It is recommended that the Architectural Review Board approve application 19ARB-0560 based upon the findings and subject to the conditions contained within this report.

Executive Summary

Proposed is a new eight-story mixed-use building with ground floor commercial space, residential units primarily on the upper floors, and a three-level subterranean parking garage. Building and landscape design and materials, as described in this report, are of high quality and comply with the design review findings. A sign program is also proposed that identifies the size, placement, and design for the building identification signage as well as any allowable signs for the future retail tenant spaces. Staff recommends conditional approval of all project components, including a condition to comply with the sign code requirements.

Project Description

The applicant is seeking Architectural Review Board approval for a new eight-story, 84-foot high mixed-use project with 140 residential rental units, 10,665 square feet of ground floor commercial space, and three-levels of subterranean parking.

Background

Preliminary Design Review

The proposed project was presented to the Architectural Review Board (ARB) for a preliminary conceptual review on November 19, 2018. Overall, the mixed-use project was criticized for being too massive in size and scale with expressed concern about the quality of the open spaces, the limited ability for natural light and air to penetrate the project's interior, and the overall livability of the residential units. The design presented an imposing street wall that offered little variation or relief except for small ground floor plazas and a framed two-story upper story open space on the fifth and sixth floors. It was suggested that since the project is a large site in comparison to others in the vicinity, the project design should reconsider the volumes and massing of the project and that it may be better executed in a multiple-building configuration that includes ample space between each building.



Original project rendering as commented on by the ARB during preliminary design review

Planning Commission review and approval

In response to concerns raised by the ARB, a revised project design with a significantly reconsidered massing strategy was presented to the Planning Commission on September 18, 2019 in conjunction with its review of a proposed Development Review Permit. In general, the Commission had a positive reaction to the project, its design, massing, and scale, and after expressing concern with the provision of off-site affordable housing, voted to approve the Development Review Permit. The Architectural Review Board (ARB) was given specific direction to pay particular attention to the following:

- Overall transparency of the ground floor to make sure an appropriate ratio of solid versus transparent surface area is achieved;
- Fenestration and articulation of 6th Street and Colorado Avenue elevations;
- Privacy between residential units; and

- Landscaping to be provided on-site with appropriately sized planters with depths to be a minimum of 36-inches.



Rendering of 6th Street elevation as approved by the Planning Commission on September 18, 2019.

Project / Site Information

The proposed eight-story residential and commercial mixed-use building is located on the north side of Colorado Avenue, extending the entire length between 6th Street and 6th Court service alley. The site is located in an area of Santa Monica downtown that has many similarly sized and scaled mixed-use projects.

The site, which consists of two separate parcels that will be tied together into a singular development parcel, is currently improved with a one-story retail commercial building (1984) with a surface parking lot located in the rear of the building, and a two-story commercial office building (1986). The existing buildings have not been identified as potential historic resources on the City’s Historic Resources Inventory. Given the age of the structures (less than 40 years of age), Landmarks Commission review of the demolition permits would not be required.

The following table provides a brief summary of project site data:

Zoning District / Land Use District:	Downtown Community Plan – Transit Adjacent (TA) / Downtown Core
Parcel Area:	22,500 SF
Parcel Dimensions:	150' X 150'

Existing On-Site Improvements (Year Built):	One-story commercial building (1984) with surface parking lot; Two story commercial office building (1986)
Historic Resources Inventory Status	Not listed on Historic Resources Inventory
CEQA	The proposed project is exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15182, which exempts projects that are consistent with a specific plan adopted pursuant to Title 7, Division 1, Chapter 3, Article 8 of the Government Code.
Adjacent Zoning Districts and Land Uses:	North: DCP-TA - five story residential/commercial South: DCP-TA – Big Blue Bus yard East: DCP-TA – one story commercial West: DCP-TA – one story commercial (seven story mixed use building proposed)

Analysis

Building Design/Architectural Concept

The building massing is broken into four building forms that appear to float above the ground surface. The 84-foot high vertical forms are uniform in appearance with a horizontal orientation that offsets their verticality. The building elevations are articulated with recessed windows and corner balconies. The design has evolved significantly since receiving input from the Architectural Review Board expressing its concern with the overall massing. The project massing balances the project’s programmatic requirements for a substantial residential density of market rate units supported by commercial space with the community’s desire for a pedestrian-oriented building design, that incorporates open space within to ensure a high quality of life.

Although a transparent ground floor level is an overall enhancement to the pedestrian environment along the public streets and sidewalks, the lack of solid elements and materials at the base of the building may result in a top heavy appearance for the vertical elements in comparison to the ground floor base. In its review of the project design, the ARB should pay particular attention to the overall transparency of the ground floor to make sure an appropriate ratio of solid versus transparent space is achieved.

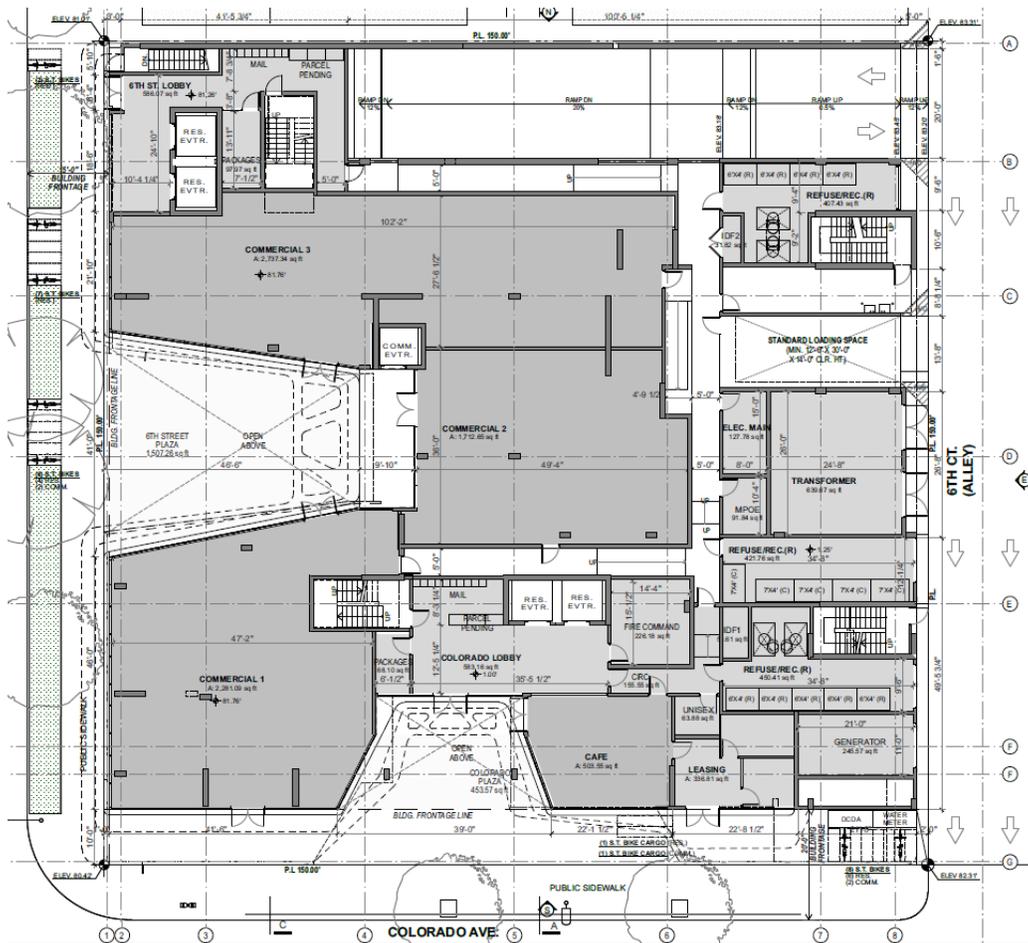
Site Planning

The design of the proposed eight-story project would consist of a transparent ground floor building mass topped by four independent buildings that are more solid in appearance. Each of the buildings are a maximum height of 84 feet and are separated by largely uninterrupted breaks and connected by intermittent bridges. On the ground floor level, the use of clear glazing would help to activate the street frontages creating a transparent street wall, and the two street facing plazas would enhance the pedestrian environment.

All of the proposed 140 residential units would be located on the upper seven floors with interior access provided via double-loaded corridors. There would be limited connectivity between the four buildings. Bridges spanning the interior courtyard open space on the

third through eighth floors would provide connection between two buildings with full connectivity between all four buildings only occurring at the second floor (podium) level. Some of the units, primarily at the building corners, would be provided with private balcony open space, but generally all of the units will be served by the central courtyard open space provided at the 2nd floor (podium) level and open space at the rooftop.

The site has direct access to 6th Court alley and all of the appurtenant infrastructure - loading zone, refuse/recycling rooms, transformer room, and the subterranean garage access ramp - are appropriately sited along this service alley at the ground floor level. The building is serviced by a three-level subterranean parking garage.



Ground Floor Plan

Landscape Design

The plant palette consists of a variety of drought tolerant species to be planted at the ground floor open space, within the interior courtyard, and the rooftop. While the plant palette is nicely done, the planter details are unclear. Further, the planting configuration at the ground floor, podium and rooftop levels will define the social spaces of the project. A condition has been added to ensure further design development. The planting palette includes signature plantings consisting of 24-inch box Aloe Trees (*Aloe barberae*), Forest Pansy Redbuds (*Cercis Canadensis*), and Lemon trees (*Citrus x limon*). 36-inch box Ginkgo trees (*Ginkgo biloba*) will add shade and color to the podium level courtyard.

These will be complemented by shrubs, vines and groundcovers, including five-gallon River Wattle (*Acacia cognate*), 15-gallon Foxtail Agave (*Agave attenuata*), and one gallon Carex (*Carex testacea*). Each plant has distinct flowering patterns allowing the courtyard to have bursts of color year-round. On the Rooftop garden area, the planters will include low-growth shrubs and ground covers due to the constrained planters and soil conditions. Potted planters are also used in these areas.

On the rooftop level, there is limited connectivity amongst building clusters and convenient access to the rooftop amenity space is not uniformly provided to residents. The design should reconsider the extent of the bridge connections at this level or consider providing additional rooftop amenity space that will be convenient to residents in all building clusters.

Mass and Scale

In response to the concerns raised by the ARB, the project massing has been revised, breaking the building into smaller individual tower components on the upper floors that are more in scale and proportion within its context. The proposed plazas at the ground floor level are deeper and provide more meaningful breaks designed as outdoor gathering spaces that engage the public sidewalk and street. The building’s overhang along the storefronts helps to define the pedestrian realm and keep the project appropriately scaled to enhance pedestrian orientation. The breaks in the mass on the upper floors create continuous open air corridors in north-south and east-west orientations that would improve access to natural light, air, and views to the open sky for all of the residential units including those on the interior.

Design and Detailing

The concept for this building uses a material palette as shown below.

DESIGN ELEMENTS	PROPOSED EXTERIOR MATERIAL, FINISH AND COLOR
Façade	Stucco, smooth trowel (white) Concrete, smooth (natural concrete)
Windows	Aluminum storefront, anodized with clear glazing Vinyl, silver frames with clear glazing
Doors	Aluminum, anodized with clear glazing
Balcony railings	Aluminum, anodized with clear glass
Roof	Thermoplastic, membrane (white) Pedestal system, wood pavers (grey, natural wood)
Mechanical Screening	Perforated metal panels, painted (grey)
Trellis/Awning/Canopy	Aluminum

The ground floor design includes two common open space areas - a 1,507 square foot space serving as a commercial plaza with an opening onto 6th Street and a 454 square foot residential entry plaza open to Colorado Avenue. The 6th Street plaza recesses approximately 56 feet from the sidewalk edge and would be framed by three commercial tenant spaces. The Colorado plaza has a shallower recess of approximately 30 feet and

would also be framed by commercial tenants, including a café space, and one of the main lobbies for the residential buildings. The extensive use of transparent glazing within the storefronts along the edges of the plazas would visually enlarge these spaces making them appear less confined.

While the extensive transparency of the ground floor is an overall enhancement to the project’s pedestrian orientation, the applicant may want to consider increasing the ratio of solid surfaces to provide more opportunity for retail identity and flexibility for the ground floor retail spaces. Also, the applicant should explore any available opportunity to relieve the blankness of the ground floor along 6th Court, possibly considering plantings to soften the concrete surfaces.

On the upper floors, although the large multi-story opening and the rectilinear pattern of expansion joints provides some articulation to the north elevation, the extensive use of white stucco creates an overall massive appearance that may warrant further consideration.

Details of the proposed vinyl-framed windows to be located on the upper floors are not included in the plan set and will need to be provided. The applicant should explore the use of other window material types.

Sign Plans/Sign Program

The applicant is requesting approval of sign plans and a sign program (for future retail tenants) for the project. All of the signs are appropriately sited, generally above the main residential entry, the garage entry, and the planned retail storefronts. If any of the commercial tenant spaces are further divided, each retail tenant is provided by code of a minimum of 25 square feet of sign area and would have to adhere to the design specifications described in the sign program. The design of the address sign (a ground monument sign) will need to be altered to comply with the design parameters as specified for ground signs where any airspace between the ground is eliminated. A condition has been included.

SIGN AREA CALCULATIONS	
Multi-tenant Building	Yes.
Existing Sign Program	No.
Permitted Sign Area	300 square feet Each retail tenant may utilize a maximum of 32 square feet
Existing Sign Area (signs that will remain)	New Construction
Proposed Sign Area (this application)	Sign ST1: “601” address ground monument = 20 SF (exempt) Sign ST2: parking entrance/exiting = 20 SF (exempt) Sign ST3: passenger loading= 4SF (exempt) Sign ST4: “Leasing Center” = 2.5 SF Sign ST5: “601 Residents” = 1 SF (exempt) Signs C1 (7 signs): Tenant sign (25 square feet max each) = 175 SF Signs C4 (6 signs): Tenant Blade sign (4 SF max each) = 24 SF

Total Sign Area Upon Completion	246.5 SF (45 square feet of which is exempt) 201.5 SF commercial sign area
Total Number of New Signs	18
Compliance	No. The design of sign ST1 will need to be slightly revised to meet the definition of a “ground sign”

Sign ST1 – “601”

Proposed Sign Type: Ground, monument sign, channel letters, illuminated
Proposed Dimensions (Area): 4’ X 5’ (20 SF)
Proposed Colors: brushed stainless steel

Sign ST2 – parking entry/exit

Proposed Sign Type: Stainless steel cabinet with attached aluminum letters
Proposed Dimensions (Area): 12” X 20’ total
Proposed Colors: metallic

Sign ST3 – passenger loading

Proposed Sign Type: 1/8” painted aluminum panel with graphics
Proposed Dimensions (Area): 2’ X 2’ total
Proposed Colors: white/metallic

Sign ST4 – “Leasing Center”

Proposed Sign Type: brushed stainless steel lettering
Proposed Dimensions (Area): 6” X 5’ total
Proposed Colors: metallic

Sign ST5 – “601 residents”

Proposed Sign Type: brushed stainless steel lettering
Proposed Dimensions (Area): 3” X 3’ total
Proposed Colors: metallic

Signs C1 (7) – “Future Tenant”

Proposed Sign Type: Canopy sign, channel letter, illuminated
Proposed Dimensions (Area): 18’ maximum cap height, 25 square feet maximum
Proposed Colors: brushed stainless steel, white acrylic face push through lettering

Signs C4 (6) – “Future Tenant”

Proposed Sign Type: Projecting Blade, non-illuminated
Proposed Dimensions (Area): 4 square feet maximum
Proposed Colors: TBD

Impact on Historic Resources

The subject property is not listed on the City’s Historic Resources Inventory.

Code Compliance

In the processing of the project’s development review permit, staff conducted extensive preliminary review for compliance with the Zoning Code, including the base district’s development standards as specified in the Downtown Community Plan. There do not

appear to be outstanding issues that could potentially affect the plans and result in significant changes to the project's design. A complete code-compliance review will occur when the application is submitted for plan check. Any significant changes to the design subsequent to any ARB approval will require Board approval.

CEQA Status

The proposed project is exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15182, which exempts projects that are consistent with a specific plan adopted pursuant to Title 7, Division 1, Chapter 3, Article 8 of the Government Code.

Summary

In conclusion, the proposed design for this eight-story, mixed-use building follows through on a consistent concept that creates a structure that will create a unique building form on this prominent site along Colorado Avenue and the Expo (E Line) light rail transit line. The building massing is broken into four independent vertical elements that appear to float above the ground surface. The buildings have a uniform yet elegant appearance with a horizontal orientation that offsets the verticality of their eight-story height. The building elevations are modulated with recessed windows and corner balconies. The building form creates commercial space that enhances the pedestrian experience and residential units with high quality amenities to serve the residents, including attractive and usable courtyard and rooftop outdoor living areas. The proposed design is consistent with the City's criteria for design as described in the Downtown Community and approval is recommended. The proposal includes sign plans that will require slight alteration to comply with code requirements.

FINDINGS:

- A. The plan for the proposed building or structure is expressive of good taste, good design, and in general contributes to the image of Santa Monica as a place of beauty, creativity and individuality in that its design is a complete architectural concept expressed through a strong vertical forms connected with open space, differing window sizes, and pedestrian-oriented ground floor commercial space. The design employs a palette of high quality materials and varying forms that are appropriate for the mix of commercial and residential uses.
- B. The proposed building or structure is not of inferior quality such as to cause the nature of the local neighborhood or environment to materially depreciate in appearance and value in that the building will use high quality material such as broad board concrete, planters, dual pane insulated glass, a combination of decorative metal materials, and outdoor living area that exceeds requirements, as detailed in the application submittal and as presented to the Architectural Review Board.
- C. The proposed design of the building or structure is compatible with developments on land in the general area in that it is similar in height and massing to other area developments along Colorado Avenue and 6th Street. The building is consistent

with the design and use objectives articulated in the Downtown Community Plan for the Transit Adjacent district in which it is located.

- D. The proposed development conforms to the effective guidelines and standards adopted pursuant to Chapter 9.55 – *Architectural Review Board*, and all other applicable ordinances insofar as the location and appearance of the buildings and structures are involved. Specifically, the location and appearance of the buildings and structures comply with required findings set forth in Chapter 9.55, as documented by the Architectural Review Board, and as conditioned, the plans will fully comply with all applicable regulations prior to the issuance of a building permit.

CONDITIONS:

1. Prior to submittal for plan check, the applicant shall work with staff on plan revisions to address the following:
 - Reconsideration of design, colors, and materials to strengthen the north elevation;
 - Revise window design to a material other than vinyl or another acceptable solution;
 - Incorporate appropriate proportions of solid areas on the street facing elevations at the ground floor level;
 - Softening the blankness of the ground floor level of the 6th Court elevation;
 - Reconsider the bridge connections between all building on the rooftop or include additional rooftop amenity space within each building cluster; and
 - Equipment associated with the children’s play area on the podium level shall be complementary to the design.
2. Prior to submittal for plan check, the applicant shall work with staff to redesign the proposed ground monument sign to comply with the requirements for ground signs specified in the City’s Sign Code.
3. Prior to submittal for plan check, the applicant shall work with staff to reconsider the landscape design at the ground floor, podium, and rooftop levels with particular attention to creating space for social interaction. The applicant should provide recessed planters so as not to negatively impact the space. Details of the planters, seat walls, and built-in furnishings shall be provided for staff’s review and approval.
4. This approval shall expire when the administrative or discretionary entitlements, not including any Subdivision Map approvals, previously granted for the project have lapsed. If no such entitlements have been granted, this approval shall expire 24 months from its effective date.
5. Prior to the issuance of a building permit, the applicant shall demonstrate landscape and irrigation plan compliance with the City’s Green Building Ordinance standards (SMMC 8.108) subject to staff approval. Modifications to the landscape

plan that effect less than 150 square feet of area may be reviewed and approved by the Staff Liaison to the Board.

6. Prior to the issuance of a building permit, the applicant shall demonstrate that the plans comply with all applicable provisions of the Zoning Ordinance. Significant changes to a project's design shall require review and approval of the Architectural Review Board. Minor changes may be approved administratively pursuant to all applicable guidelines.
 - o Any alterations to the fenestration pattern, including louvers and sunshades, must maintain the design intent and provide a similar (or greater) amount of light and air by maintaining a similar amount of window area and number of operable panels.
 - o Awnings should be maintained as designed, or if modified, provide the same design intent and relationship to the ground floor retail.
 - o Any alterations to the curvilinear floor openings in the bridges shall maintain their design intent and be of a similar size and form.
 - o Plaster shall be smooth finish.

The Architectural Review Board's approval, conditions of approval, or denial of this application may be appealed to the Planning Commission if the appeal is filed with the Zoning Administrator within ten consecutive days following the date of the Architectural Review Board's determination in the manner provided in SMMC 9.61.100.

Attachments

- A. Applicant's Submittal Material

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