



City of Santa Barbara
Community Development Department

Memorandum

DATE: December 12, 2013
TO: Historic Landmarks Commission
FROM: Peter Lawson, Associate Planner
SUBJECT: Waterfront Hotel Revisions

Background

In 1993, the City approved a Specific Plan Amendment and other land use permits to allow the 150-room hotel, along with a 10-acre park, and 75-bed hostel (now a 100-bed hostel, per a Coastal Commission requirement). Per the conditions of approval, the park and hostel were to be completed prior to the opening of the hotel. In 1995, Mr. Parker requested an agreement (Development Agreement) to extend the time of his approvals with the City because there was limited financing available for hotel development. As required by the Development Agreement, expenditure of funds and donation of the park property would be provided immediately, in exchange for extending the approval expiration date for his hotel and hostel from 1997 to 2007. The City approved this change. That action allowed the Waterfront Park (Chase Palm Park Expansion) construction to proceed.

In 2007 building permits were issued for both the Hotel and the Youth Hostel (located at Helena Street). Soil remediation and grading for the Hotel began in 2008 and building permits were issued for a portion of the structure. All of these building permits are currently valid. The Youth Hostel is nearly completed and a certificate of occupancy is expected to be issued in early 2014.

Current Request

In 2012 the applicant approached the City to discuss revising the permits and reduce the scope of the hotel by approximately 30%, as well as moving the back of house operations to the surface parking area located north of the railroad tracks. Because the reduced scope of work would result in a different design and layout than the approved project, staff determined that the discretionary permits needed to be revised/changed and the expiration dates of those permits extended. The Development Agreement is proposed to be amended to extend the time period allowed for the applicant to either complete the prior approved project or move forward with an alternative designed project.

Next Steps

Staff is currently reviewing a draft Development Agreement that incorporates the proposed project, extends the expiration date of the discretionary permits along with updated performance measures. HLC Conceptual Review is the next step before Planning Commission review of the project. Then City Council will consider the Development Agreement including approval of the original project and the revised project. At some point within the terms of the agreement the applicant would move forward again to complete the design review process with the HLC and obtain new building permits.

HLC Conceptual Review

The project is subject to several design guidelines:

- Historic Landmarks Commission General Design Guidelines
- Waterfront Area Aesthetic Criteria for Development
- Urban Design Guidelines: City Grid
- Specific Plan No. 1 - Park Plaza

Each of the design guidelines overlap to a certain degree (e.g., neighborhood compatibility, landscaping, and site layout) and one of the common themes is preservation, to the greatest extent feasible, of views to the mountains and to the ocean. The term “openness” is used in some of the guidelines when describing developments adjacent to open space such as parks. The idea being that a development’s massing should complement the surrounding open space as well as preserving background views.

The Urban Design Guidelines focuses on infrastructure both on site (e.g., parking and utilities) and immediately offsite (e.g., transit services and pedestrian amenities). The Waterfront Area Aesthetic Criteria focuses on the natural environment and encourages development to compliment the natural and open feeling of the Waterfront, as well as the views along Cabrillo Boulevard. The Park Plaza Specific Plan states that development of the Waterfront Hotel parcel can include a three story structure if HLC provides input on height setback study, which is intended to demonstrate that views are maximized.

The proposed project is still in a very conceptual stage. However, upon initial review, the reduced project complies with many of the provisions in the design guidelines by breaking the development into multiple buildings and moving all of the back-of-house, along with the parking offsite to the north. Much of the focus of the review of this project by HLC will be on consistency with the EPV Guidelines. Specifically, one of the discussion topics will be determining appropriate materials for the project given its unique location adjacent to the Chase Palm Park to the west, the industrial zoned parcels to the north (outside of the EPV), and the Doubletree Hotel to the east.