



# City of Santa Barbara California

## PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

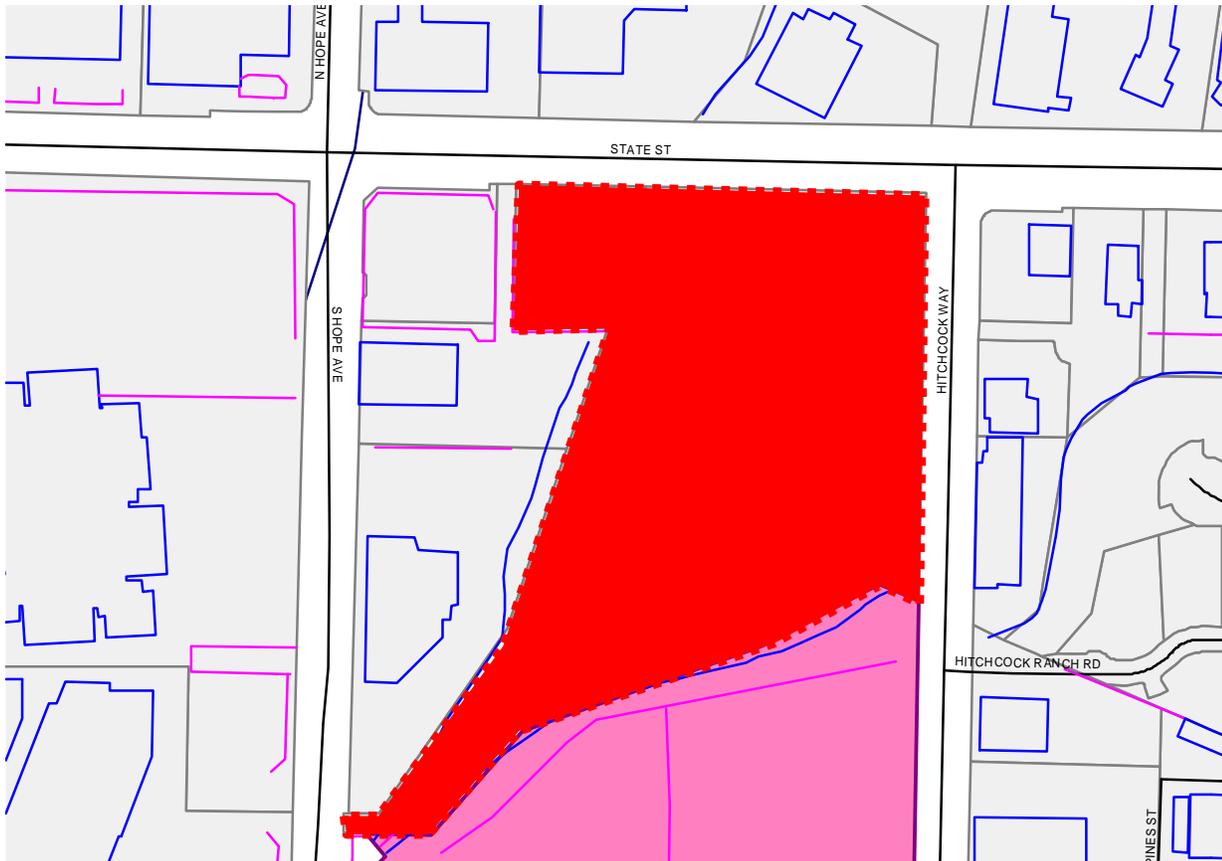
**REPORT DATE:** July 11, 2005  
**AGENDA DATE:** July 14, 2005  
**PROJECT ADDRESS:** 3757-3771 State Street (MST2005-00156)  
**TO:** Planning Commission  
**FROM:** Planning Division, (805) 564-5470  
Jan Hubbell, AICP, Senior Planner  
Trish Allen, Associate Planner

### **I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The project site totals 3.54 acres and includes four contiguous parcels located at the southwest corner of State Street and Hitchcock Way. The properties are currently developed with 58,325 square feet of commercial space within several separate buildings, and contain tenants such as Citibank, Circuit City, Weight Watchers and Taco Bell. San Roque Creek bounds the site to the south and Barger Canyon Creek bounds the site on the west.

The proposed project involves demolition of all existing structures on site and construction of four new one-story commercial/retail buildings (maximum height of 28 feet) totaling 69,581 square feet. Potential occupants of the buildings include Whole Foods Market, Citibank and Circuit City, as well as other retail and commercial uses. New surface parking is proposed as well as rooftop parking above the Whole Foods building, for a total of 281 parking spaces. The project would also include grading and drainage improvements, creek habitat restoration and public improvements.

As currently proposed, the discretionary applications required for this project would be: a Development Plan for 67,226 square feet of development in the C-P Zone (SBMC §28.54.120); a Development Plan for a net increase of 8,901 square feet of non-residential development from the minor and small addition categories (SBMC §28.87.300); a Transfer of Existing Development Rights for Measure E purposes (SBMC §28.95.030); a Modification to provide less than the required number of parking spaces (SBMC §28.90.100); a Modification of the required front yard setback along State Street (SBMC §28.54.060 and 28.45.008); a Modification of the required front yard setback along Hitchcock Way (SBMC §28.45.008); Design Review by the Architectural Board of Review for nonresidential development (SBMC §22.68.040); Historic Landmarks Commission review and approval of the Phase 1 Archaeological Resources Report; and a Lot Merger of three contiguous parcels (SBMC Chapter 27.30).



## **II. PRE-APPLICATION REVIEW**

The project was submitted to the City's Pre-Application Review Team (PRT) process on March 15, 2005. The primary issue areas identified in the PRT letter were: site design, creek setbacks and biological resources, parking and circulation, and public improvements (refer to Exhibit E for PRT letter). Staff met with the project proponents on May 3, 2005, to discuss the content of the PRT letter. Staff recommended Concept Review by the Planning Commission to receive early feedback on the adequacy of the creek setback and proposed improvements within that buffer area, policy consistency with the City's Urban Design Guidelines and Circulation Element and potential public improvements.

This project has not yet been reviewed by the Architectural Board of Review (ABR).

## **III. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

The PRT submittal package included a Phase I Traffic and Parking Assessment prepared by Associated Transportation Engineers, dated March 15, 2005, and a Biological Assessment prepared by Rachel Tierney Consulting, dated March 14, 2004. Staff requested revisions to the Traffic and Parking Assessment to include a recalculation of the required parking per the Zoning Ordinance, a distribution analysis to determine potential impacts to area intersections, and a Transportation Demand Management plan to reduce employee parking demand. Staff also requested more clarification regarding the Biological Assessment. The analysis generally concluded that implementation of the proposed project would result

in an overall benefit in terms of protection of biological resources and water quality due to the increase in structural setback and proposed drainage improvements as compared to the existing condition (please refer to PRT letter for specific additional details requested). The PRT review concluded that the following technical reports are required for the project to proceed: a Phase I Archaeology Report, a soils report with preliminary foundation recommendations, an engineering geology report to address creek bank stability, and an environmental site assessment. The environmental determination has not been made for this project, although Staff anticipates the preparation of an Initial Study once the application has been deemed complete in order to analyze the project's potential environmental impacts.

#### **IV. ISSUES**

##### **A. CREEKS**

The majority of the project site is completely developed with various commercial buildings and pavement. The creeks that border the site both have natural bottoms and various bank reinforcements that include gabion walls, large ungrouted boulders, and wire revetment. Downstream from the site, the creeks converge and enter a concrete channel; upstream, Barger Canyon Creek runs within a 12 foot culvert under the northwestern portion of the subject property, is underground beneath State Street, and daylight north of San Remo Drive. Upstream, San Roque Creek is contained in a channel with a natural bottom east of the project site, but maintains a minimal vegetated buffer through the residential neighborhoods.

The purpose of creating a creek setback area is to address several issue areas including, flood protection, bank stability, erosion control, aesthetics, protection and enhancement of biological resources, support of fire management strategies, increased recreational opportunities, improvement of water quality, and supplementing groundwater recharge.

The Conservation Element of the General Plan contains an extensive discussion regarding creek related issues. The Conservation Element identifies the importance of creek management and recognizes that there should be a balance between urban development and resource protection. The Conservation Element states:

*The absence of creek management in the past has resulted in alteration of creek environments through practices such as concrete channelization, defoliation of riparian vegetation, and dumping of debris into creeks. These actions and some creekside construction activities severely detract from the creek's visual value and indirectly contribute to degradation of the coastal environment as well. (pg. 10)*

The Element contains general planning goals, policies, and implementation strategies as a means to achieve consistent planning. The document recognizes that, while full implementation of the policies would be the most desirable, there are often competing demands for preservation, enhancement, development and conservation. The GP goals, policies, and implementation strategies that speak to development in the creek area include the following:

##### Goal

*Restore where feasible, maintain, enhance, and manage the creekside environments within the City as visual amenities, where consistent with sound flood control management and soil conservation techniques.*

Policy

*Development adjacent to creeks shall not degrade the creeks or their riparian environments.*

Implementation Strategies

*Developments which require retaining walls or other topographic modifications of the creekside environment should not be permitted unless consistent with sound flood control management and soil conservation techniques.*

The project proposes approximately a 50 foot structural setback measured from the 100 year water surface elevation. Staff requested that the applicant indicate the calculated top of bank per SBMC §28.87.250 on the plans. The site survey prepared by Waters Land Surveying dated October 2004, indicates the surveyed toe of slope (green), the 100 year water surface elevation (black), and the calculated 1 ½ H:1 V slope (red).

The 50 foot setback includes three areas: the riparian restoration area, a vegetated filter strip, and a driveway constructed from permeable pavers. The three areas range in width within the structural setback area. At the driveway entrance off of Hitchcock Way, adjacent to San Roque Creek, the restored area would be 4 feet wide, the vegetated strip would be 6 feet wide and the paved area would be 40 feet wide. Further down the service driveway, at the transition between Circuit City and Whole Foods, the restored area would be 22 feet, the vegetated filter strip would be 10 feet, and the paved area would be 35 feet. At the loading area for Whole Foods, the restored area would be 8 feet, the vegetated filter strip would be 12 feet and the paved area would be 30 feet.

Along the Barger Canyon Creek portion of the site, the project proposes a 50 foot structural setback from the 100 year line. At the southwest corner of the new structure, the setback includes approximately 12 feet of restored area, a 6 foot vegetated filter strip, and 44 feet of pavement. Further toward the north the restored area would be 5 feet wide and the vegetated filter strip would be 44 feet; at this point, the auto ramp to access the upper parking deck is proposed to extend over the vegetated filter strip for a distance of 30 feet, leaving an unobstructed 10 foot wide strip and a maximum of 10 feet of restored area.

Although the proposed project would clearly improve the existing conditions relative to the increase in the creek buffer and extensive water quality improvements, Staff has concerns regarding the adequacy of the buffer area and policy consistency relative to development adjacent to creeks. The buffer area includes permeable pavement to be used as a driveway, primarily behind the structures adjacent to San Roque Creek and an auto ramp above the vegetated area adjacent to Barger Canyon Creek. Additionally, a project is also proposed across Barger Canyon Creek at 15 S. Hope Avenue. Staff is encouraging the two applicants to work together. This would result in a consistent approach and could potentially maximize benefits to the creek.

Staff would like feedback on the question of the methodology used to establish the top of the creek bank, allowing the existing bank reinforcements and retaining wall to remain, and laying the creek banks back to create a more natural bank. Even though the methodology outlined in the Zoning Ordinance is required only for Mission Creek, for consistency, staff has used the

same approach for all creeks in the City. The Biological Assessment prepared for the project concludes that the project proposes an improvement as compared to the existing conditions and, therefore, does not identify project impacts to biological resources. This conclusion may be valid from an environmental impact analysis standpoint, but it does not respond to the policy considerations outlined above.

**B. SITE LAYOUT**

The proposed project site plan locates buildings in approximately similar locations as the existing site layout. Overall, this layout is inconsistent with the City’s Urban Design Guidelines and Circulation Element policies that recommend buildings be located at the street and discourages locating surface parking lots at the street frontage.

The following is a list of some relevant Urban Design Guidelines:

<i>Chapter 3 Goals</i>	<i>Encourage pedestrian activity on the street through building design. Frequent building entrances, windows at pedestrian height, and outdoor activity spaces create a lively, pedestrian-friendly environment along public streets.</i>
<i>3.1.5</i>	<i>Corner buildings shall exhibit a strong visual and functional connection with the sidewalks of adjacent streets...</i>
<i>3.2.4</i>	<i>Where appropriate and consistent with neighboring development, locate new buildings on the edge of the public right-of-way to define the sidewalk line.</i>
<i>4.4.1</i>	<i>Establish direct pedestrian pathways between buildings to promote efficient on-site circulation.</i>
<i>8.1.1</i>	<i>Locate surface parking lots away from the street edge to minimize visual effects on the streetscape. Surface parking lots should be located behind habitable buildings and toward the interior of blocks.</i>
<i>8.1.2</i>	<i>If a surface parking lot must abut a street edge, minimize the amount of street frontage devoted to the lot by locating the lot to the side of the building rather than between the building and the street.</i>
<i>8.1.5</i>	<i>Provide direct pedestrian access to building entrances from each exposed street frontage and/or adjacent pedestrian facility. Pedestrians entering from the sidewalk shall not be required to walk through a surface parking lot to enter a building.</i>
<i>9.1.2</i>	<i>Locate service and equipment areas to minimize visibility from public spaces...</i>
<i>9.1.3</i>	<i>Locate loading/unloading and utility areas to minimize conflicts with pedestrian and vehicular circulation.</i>

As the majority of the building mass is located at the rear of the site and there is a substantial parking lot that would be located at the street, the project does not comply with many of the above-listed design guidelines.

The Circulation Element (Policy 13.4.2) recommends that buildings be oriented toward pedestrian activity through methods such as orienting building facades toward streets and sidewalks, reducing or eliminating setbacks for non-residential uses, and placing parking lots behind buildings or underground, if feasible.

The Upper State Street Area Design Guidelines are also applicable in this area and will be considered by the Architectural Board of Review (ABR) in their review of the project. The following site planning guidelines would be applicable to this project and should be considered in your review:

- Parking is preferred behind the building rather than fronting on the street;
- Ease and safety of ingress and egress;
- Building setbacks should be in scale with their height and mass, and should respect the setbacks of adjacent buildings;
- Buildings must have human scale; and
- Structures should be designed so as to lead the neighborhood toward designs that are harmonious with the City's distinctive built environment.

Given the many policies and guidelines that the City has with regard to appropriate urban design, staff has concerns that the proposed site layout does not achieve these goals and may therefore be inconsistent with City goals for new development.

There are, however, other site constraints, such as the creeks, that create a "tug-of-war" with respect to balancing City policies related to creek protection and urban design.

While specific elements of the project, and their compatibility with the neighborhood, will be discussed in more detail at future ABR hearings, staff would appreciate the Commission's comments with respect to the overall site design, street presence, and mass, bulk, and scale of the project.

### **C. PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS**

Staff is recommending sidewalk and parkway improvements along both frontages of the site. Along State Street, an eight-foot wide sidewalk and a four-foot wide landscaped parkway are recommended, which will require a street easement dedication for the public improvements. Along Hitchcock Way, a 10-foot wide sidewalk with intermittent tree wells within that 10 foot wide space is required. This is essentially the same as the existing condition. Feedback on the appropriateness of these improvements, particularly the recommended widths of sidewalk and parkway, would be appreciated, especially with regard to potential impacts on building proximity to the sidewalk and the front yard setback modification requests.

The applicant has identified an existing sewer line that runs across the site as a site constraint with regard to building location. In the PRT review, staff determined that it is feasible to relocate the sewer line entirely within the public right-of-way. The applicant has since provided additional information on the feasibility of such a relocation, and City staff has agreed that the cost and potential risk associated with a total sewer line relocation are not warranted in this case, so only a short length of sewer line will be relocated in addition to rehabilitation of one existing manhole and installation of several new sewer manholes. Feedback from the Planning Commission on this determination would be appreciated.

### **V. SUMMARY**

The purpose of this hearing is to provide the applicant with feedback as they work towards the

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ultimate goal of reaching an appropriate and supportable site plan that meets the City's goals as well as the goals of potential commercial tenants in these spaces.

Exhibits:

- A. Applicant's Letter dated July 6, 2005
- B. Letter from Whole Foods Market, dated June 14, 2005
- C. Site Plan
- D. Biological Study dated May 13, 2005
- E. PRT letter dated April 26, 2005