

DATE: June 13, 2017

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council

FROM: Eric Anderson, Senior Planner
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Director

VIA: Daniel H. Rich, City Manager

TITLE: 938 and 954 Villa Street Historic Resources



PURPOSE

Staff is seeking City Council feedback on the proposed elimination of two historic resources to accommodate a proposed office and restaurant development at 938 and 954 Villa Street. Staff is also seeking feedback on the potential relocation and future uses of one of the structures.

BACKGROUND

The 938 and 954 Villa Street site is located one block west of Castro Street in the City's downtown area. It is comprised of two parcels, each with a restaurant under two separate ownerships. 938 Castro Street is "Chez TJ," a high-end dining establishment in a historic former single-family home, and 954 Villa Street is "Tied House," a brewery and restaurant in a historic commercial building.



An area map is shown at right. The site is approximately 1,000' from the Downtown Transit Center. It is next to a recently constructed four-story office building (900 Villa Street, at the corner of Villa and Bryant Streets); it is also next to a two-story commercial building (990 Villa Street, at the corner of Villa and Franklin Streets). Behind the site to the north are two residential properties. Townhomes and one of the City's public parking lots are across Villa Street to the south. The 1.2-acre

parking lot (Lot 11) is a temporary parking lot and is considered a development opportunity site.

The site's zoning is the Downtown Precise Plan. The Precise Plan allows three stories of office or residential development over ground-floor commercial at a total floor area ratio (FAR) of 1.85. The Precise Plan also establishes setbacks, parking, and other requirements and provides guidance on design. The proposed project will be consistent with the standards and guidelines of the Precise Plan, and will not need a Gatekeeper authorization.

DISCUSSION

Project Description

The purpose of this Study Session is for the City Council to provide feedback on the elimination or preservation of two historic structures, not the project as a whole. This is because the project complies with the Precise Plan. The following project description is provided for context.



View of Proposed Project from Villa Street

The Developer, The Minkoff Group, proposes a four-story, 41,876 square foot office building, including a 2,922 square foot ground-floor restaurant. A Villa Street rendering is shown above. The developer is working in partnership with the two property owners.

The proposed building is modern in character, utilizing materials such as glass, terra cotta, and stone tile. Many of the building's architectural features are designed to optimize the building's energy efficiency. The developer is targeting LEED Platinum® construction.

The facade facing Villa Street is broken into two masses, which preserves the block's rhythm of 75' parcels. The west mass is made up of terra cotta walls, projecting out over and around glass facades. The restaurant is located in the ground floor of this half of the building. The east mass is clad primarily in terra cotta solar shades.

The project would preserve the two large magnolia trees that are currently in front of Chez TJ. These trees provide shade over a public plaza and outdoor dining area. Other open space amenity areas are provided on each of the four floors and roof deck.



View of Proposed Project from the Alley

The rear facade overlooks an alley (see rendering above). The Downtown Family Apartments and the condominiums at 108 Bryant Street are opposite the project site across the alley. A stone tile elevator and stairwell tower separates the two halves of the building on this facade, providing access to the roof deck. The ground floor of this facade contains at-grade parking, a trash enclosure, and other “back-of-house” necessities. This area would be screened with landscaping. A large balcony is also located on the second floor level of this facade.

Ninety-four (94) parking spaces are required for the building. The applicants have initially proposed to provide all required parking on-site, without needing to pay in-lieu fees. However, during the development review process, minor changes to the project may change the number of required spaces or the number of spaces provided. In this case, a portion of the project’s parking spaces may be supplied with in-lieu fees.

Historic Criteria

The project site is currently occupied with two historic structures, 938 and 954 Villa Street. Whether a structure is considered a historic resource is based on specific criteria:

- If it was associated with a person or organization important to the history of the City.
- If it was the site of a significant event in the City’s history.
- If it embodies distinctive architectural characteristics significant to the City’s history.
- Has yielded or may yield information important to the City’s history or prehistory.

When the City conducted a Downtown Historic Resources Survey in 2003, these two sites were found to comply with at least one of these criteria. The results of that survey are included as Attachment 1.

Neither of these two structures is on the City’s official Local Historic Register. However, a structure may be considered a historic resource and not be on the City’s Register. The California Supreme Court has ruled that a structure is a historic resource based on the criteria above, and not based on whether or not it is in a Local Register. Because the structures comply with at least one of the criteria, they are considered historic resources.

938 Villa Street (Chez TJ)

The house at 938 Villa Street, currently occupied by Chez TJ, is called the “Weilheimer House” after the name of its first resident, Julius Weilheimer. The attached property survey states the building was built around 1894 (though the building does not show up on Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps until 1904). Therefore, it may be one of the 10 oldest structures in the downtown area, and one of the 20 oldest structures Citywide.



Weilheimer—a merchant, postmaster, and City Board of Trustees member—was a prominent early Mountain View resident. The house was also home to Arthur Free when he was City Attorney (circa 1910). Free later became a Congressman, from 1921 to 1933. According to the 2003 survey, the house is “an excellent example of Queen Anne style cottage.”

The property owner has made significant changes to the building since the late 1980s. The original brick foundation has been replaced with a conventional concrete foundation and an addition was built for the commercial kitchen. In addition, the siding, roof, porch, and most of the windows are not original, according to the owner. Despite this work, the building has architectural integrity as a historic resource. This is because the work has been done in a way that maintains the architectural style of the original. In addition, the building stands out due to the quality of the work and good condition of the building.

954 Villa Street (Tied House)

The building at 954 Villa Street, currently occupied by Tied House, was built around 1931. It is directly associated with the development of the City’s downtown. It is also “an excellent example of a Spanish Eclectic style commercial building.” Despite minor alterations, the



building maintains its historic and architectural integrity.

Preservation of Historic Resources

The key policy question for the City Council is whether to approve the elimination of the historic resources, which are a finite resource, for the construction of an office building, which is not. A key element of the historic resource is the structure's presence in its urban context, so relocation would also result in a loss of the cultural resource.

Historic structures are considered cultural resources under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Significant changes to the structures, including demolition and relocation, are considered significant, unavoidable impacts. If the City Council allows the office development to go forward, an Environmental Impact Report will be prepared to document these impacts. A Statement of Overriding Considerations would need to be issued for the project to be approved.

If the City Council supports the loss of historic resources, the applicant and staff will continue to refine the office development project, returning to the City Council at a later date for final approval. If the City Council does not support the loss of one or both these historic resources, the office project would not be able to proceed as currently proposed.

Question 1

Should the historic resources be protected (eliminating the possibility of the proposed office project) or does the City Council support the loss of one or both of the historic resources?

Relocation

The neighboring property—900 Villa Street—had a historic structure (the Pearson House) until it was demolished to build the existing office building. This demolition was approved in July 2012, after the applicant tried to work with the Historical Association to move the building to Cuesta Park Annex as part of a History Museum, but was not successful. A small building on that site, the "Immigrant House," was moved to Heritage Park on North Rengstorff Avenue.

It may be possible for Chez TJ to be relocated. Tied House is a much larger building, so it would be more difficult to find a suitable location for it. As previously stated, relocating either building would be an impact on the historic resource.

The City does not have a clear need for a building such as Chez TJ. However, if the City Council would like to relocate the building, there are several potential public purposes for which the building could be used, including:

- an event space;
- temporary or affordable housing;
- employee housing or dorms;
- staff office space;
- classroom/recreation space; or
- a lease to a commercial use (such as a restaurant or day care).

The City owns some vacant or partially underutilized properties that may be suitable for Chez TJ. Possible locations may include properties on Wright Avenue, South Shoreline Boulevard, or Wyandotte Street, or a small portion of an existing City park may be repurposed. If the City Council expresses interest in relocating the building, staff will work with the applicant to identify options for location and use. If feasible options are found, they will be presented to the City Council when the project returns for the final decision. If not, the City Council will have the option to approve the office development (demolishing the structures) or deny the project (preserving them).

There are costs associated with relocating the building, including the moving costs, bringing the building up to current building codes, and any special improvements needed for the intended use. Most, if not all, of these costs would be the responsibility of the developer. The City would be responsible for the long-term maintenance and operation costs of the building if it is donated to the City. If the City Council supports accepting the building, staff will provide a fiscal analysis when the project returns for the final decision.

If the City Council does not wish to relocate either building and does not want them demolished, the office development would not likely be able to proceed. The City Council could indicate whether they would support relocating the structure(s) to another private property, but this is an unlikely scenario.

Question 2

Would the City Council be interested in accepting the Chez TJ building to be used for City purposes in another location? If so, what should the building be used for?

Public Input

The developer has met with the Mountain View Historical Association, the Old Mountain View Neighborhood Association, and the Central Business Association.

On June 5, the developer held a public outreach meeting. The meeting was attended by about 20 to 30 people. Neighbors expressed concern about impacts from the project, including noise, glare, privacy, traffic, alley activity, parking, and shadows. There was discussion about the new restaurant concept. There were also comments about the importance of the historical resource and concern about loss of the view of the old building.

On June 6, the developer presented the project to the Downtown Committee. Committee and public input included discussion of the restaurant concept, questions about pick-up/drop-off and site contamination, and interest in preserving public access to the plaza.

Two e-mails about the project have been received by staff. They are included as Attachment 2.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff is seeking City Council feedback on the loss of two historic resources for a proposed office and restaurant development at 938 and 954 Villa Street, either through demolition or acquisition. Staff recommends the City Council respond to the following questions:

1. Should the historic resources be protected (eliminating the possibility of the proposed office project) or does the City Council support the loss of one or both of the historic resources?
2. Would the City Council be interested in accepting the Chez TJ building to be used for City purposes in another location? If so, what should the building be used for?

NEXT STEPS

If the City Council supports the demolition or relocation of the buildings, staff will continue working with the applicant to refine the design of the proposed building. Staff will also prepare an Environmental Impact Report to document the impact of the loss of

the historic resources, as required under CEQA. The proposed development will return to the City Council for approval at a later date.

If the City Council recommends relocating one or both structures, City staff will need to work with the property owner(s) to identify potential locations for them and the terms of any such transfer.

PUBLIC NOTICING

The Council's agenda is advertised on Channel 26, and the agenda and this report appear on the City's website. All property owners within a 500' radius and other interested stakeholders, including the Central Business Association, the Chamber of Commerce, the Old Mountain View Neighborhood Association, and Mountain View Historical Association, were notified of this meeting.

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Attachments: 1. Historic Resources Surveys
2. Public Comment