

March 30, 2020

City of Burlingame
LETTER OF EXPLANATION

Post Office Site – 220 Park Road

Existing Conditions and Context

The proposed project site (“the Property”) is located at 220 Park Road in the heart of downtown Burlingame. The 1.28-acre parcel fronts Park Road to the southwest and Lorton Avenue to the northeast and sits mid-block between the downtown’s primary retail corridor of Burlingame Avenue on one side and Howard Avenue on the other. Park Road and Lorton Avenues themselves have active retail storefronts lining their sidewalks as well. The site is less than a quarter mile and a short walk from Burlingame’s Caltrain station and falls within Burlingame’s Howard Avenue Mixed Use District (“HAMU District”).

Directly abutting the northwest boundary of the Property is a public, city-owned, surface parking lot referred to as Lot E. The City of Burlingame (“the City”) is currently engaged in a process to redevelop approximately half of the parking lot (the Park Road side) into a public plaza referred to as “Town Square.” The existing public parking stalls in Lot E would not be replaced in the City’s current conceptual scheme. There’s promising opportunity for coordinated design and activation at the interface between the Property and the future square so that the Property adds vibrancy to and helps visually frame Town Square.

The 220 Park Road project site itself currently contains a historic but vacant US Post Office building of 13,293 square feet, a free-standing garage building of 1,275 square feet, and a surface parking lot and driveways with 51 total parking stalls. The Property has remained unused since the US Postal Service ceased operations on the site in 2015 and is currently surrounded by a chain link fence to reduce trespassing and vandalism.

Project Summary

The proposed redevelopment (“the Proposed Project”) includes the restoration and reactivation of portions of the historic Spanish-deco post office building in accordance with the 2013 Preservation Covenant applicable to the site. The marble-clad post office lobby and main historic entry, façade, and lawn along Park Road will be preserved as a familiar presence in downtown Burlingame. The Proposed Project maximizes the preservation and appropriate reuse of historic architecture consistent with the Preservation Covenant, the City’s Historic Preservation Ordinance (“HPO”), and the Secretary of Interior Guidelines, while enabling redevelopment that is essential for reactivating the site and rehabilitating the historic elements.

Behind these historically important portions of the building, demolition of the rest of the vacant building and the addition of a new six-story building with two levels of underground parking will activate the long-abandoned site. Ground floor uses will consist of retail along Lorton Avenue, Town Square, and portions of Park Rd, as well as ancillary building services and parking. The upper floors are programmed for office use. In total, the Proposed Project (inclusive of the preserved historic elements) consists of 140,020 square feet of Office, 11,915 square feet of Retail, and 280 covered parking stalls (2.0 stalls for every 1,000 square feet of office, as described further in accompanying documents).

Architecturally, the new building is designed to respectfully engage with the preserved portions of the post office. The new building's form tiers and steps back as it rises, providing relief from the post office building, Town Square, and the public retail corridors of Park Road and Lorton Avenue. Balconies are strategically placed at these setbacks to visually activate the vertical plane, as well as provide outdoor space for the office occupants. As the building steps back from the property edges, it reaches to a pinnacle of six stories, providing an iconic architectural expression for this important downtown site. (Further description of the requested height is described in accompanying documents). Architecturally, the building uses a system of elegant vertical columns and well-proportioned windows to create a consistent rhythm across the face of the building and provide relief on the façades. Windows are deeply inset within the precast concrete building skin, thereby articulating the vertical building planes and alluding to similar materials and treatments on the post office facades themselves. The new building's architecture is careful not to slavishly replicate the post office's, though, so that the historic post office is always foregrounded and differentiated as one looks towards the site.

The Proposed Project layout also includes generous outdoor space along the adjacent City lot in order to help activate this future plaza. The building is set inboard from the underground storm drain culvert that runs along the northwest edge of the property, and that space is dedicated towards a new landscaped paseo. By introducing pavers similar to those on Burlingame Avenue, plantings, and outdoor furniture for the future retail uses fronting this area, the paseo becomes a new mid-block pedestrian connection, links Town Square with Lorton Avenue, and visually begins to extend Burlingame Avenue's public realm towards Town Square. Along the historic post office lobby structure, the Proposed Project includes an elevated patio that provides opportunities for future restaurant or brewery patrons to spill into the outdoors and creates an opportunity for engagement between Town Square and this prominent post office lobby façade.

Parking for the Proposed Project is provided primarily through two levels of underground parking that span the entirety of the site and under the historic buildings. Additionally, the plan extends the underground parking under a portion of the adjacent city-owned parking lot and future public plaza via an underground easement with the city. In exchange, the Proposed Project will make these additional parking spaces available for public use at certain times. Partly in exchange for this easement and partly in exchange for a reduced office parking ratio, all 280 parking stalls will be available for public use in the evenings and on weekends in order to provide greater parking capacity to those visiting Burlingame's downtown. These 280 parking spaces will greatly outnumber the thirty-eight spaces the public will otherwise lose via the City's conversion of part of Lot E into Town Square and will help provide additional parking for patrons of downtown eateries and retailers.

No on-site parking is provided for the on-site retail uses, consistent with the HAMU District zoning. The existing on-street 45-degree and parallel parking spaces along the property's street frontages will generally be maintained, accommodating for the relocation and modification of the curb cuts that provide site access and except for designated rideshare drop-off and pick-up zones (annotated on the accompanying submittal documents).

Around the property perimeter, the design language, materials, and trees of Burlingame Avenue will be incorporated into the sidewalks fronting the parcel to help expand the active public realm from towards Town Square. The sidewalk-fronting trees along Lorton Avenue will be removed to accommodate a wider sidewalk consistent with the more generous sidewalk layout to the southeast of the Property and in order to accommodate new retail frontage along Lorton Ave that will activate the pedestrian realm in

this section of Lorton Avenue, all consistent with the City’s Tree Preservation Ordinance. The new sidewalk will accommodate new street trees in a layout that more closely matches those on the opposite side of Lorton Avenue, where street trees are in wells on the street-fronting portion of the sidewalk.

Application of Municipal Code 21

Municipal Code 21.04.120 “Preservation Incentives” enumerates incentives and flexibility of standards that are available for properties maintaining historic resources in accordance with Secretary of Interior Standards. Section 3.B. “Development Standard Flexibility” specifically acknowledges the challenges involved in redeveloping a site with historic resources that need to be preserved when compared with an unencumbered site. This section offers flexibility of standard development requirements to make up for development hardship that would not otherwise exist.

The Proposed Project requests to use these municipal development standard flexibilities in order to maintain the historic integrity and prominence of portions of Burlingame’s historic post office building from the 1940s. In exchange, the Proposed Project seeks 1) an increase in height on a portion of the site to accommodate the historic building’s low scale elsewhere on the property and to allow the architecture to step back from nearby public spaces, and 2) a parking reduction that is still market appropriate to account for the obstacle of building around a historic building and in exchange for public access on weekday evenings and on weekends.

Both requests are described in further detail in accompanying documents.

California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”)

The proposed project is anticipated to require the following discretionary entitlements: Design Review approval, Historic Review approval, Variances under the Historic Preservation Ordinance (“HPO”), Tree Removal approval, and City approval of a Parking Easement. These entitlements trigger environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”). Projects that are consistent with a General Plan and Specific Plan can rely on certified General Plan EIRs and Specific Plan EIRs for tiering purposes under CEQA Guidelines Sections 15162 and 15168. The City certified its General Plan EIR in January 2019 and the Downtown Specific Plan (“DSP”) Mitigated Negative Declaration in 2010.

It is anticipated that if, as is currently proposed, the proposed project complies with the Preservation Covenant, the City HPO, the DSP, and the HAMU District Regulations; that taking into account the flexibility built into the City’s HPO and HAMU District Regulations (Variances/Special Permit); and that subject to additional analysis of the ability of the proposed project to comply with the applicable requirements, the project can rely on or tier from either document in pursuing approval of the proposed project using a 15183 Consistency Checklist (Projects Consistent with a Community Plan, General Plan, or Zoning).