



CITY OF BURLINGAME PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

Agenda Item: 8a	Hearing Date: December 8, 2025
Project No.	CDSR23-0001
Location	1430 Chapin Avenue APN: 029-121-440
Applicant	Neal Yung, developURBAN
Property Owner	JP Morgan Chase Bank, N.A.
Architect	Jonathan Heppner, Lever Architecture
Staff	Erika Lewit, Senior Planner
General Plan Designation	Downtown Specific Plan, Chapin Avenue Area
Zoning	CAC (Chapin Avenue Commercial)
Lot Area	30,327 SF

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Review of an application for Amendments to the Downtown Specific Plan and Zoning Code to increase the maximum building height in the Chapin Avenue Area from 55 feet to 75 feet with a Special Permit. Major Design Review and Special Permit for building height to construct an 87,172 square foot, five-story commercial building with two levels of below-grade parking. A Lot Merger to combine three lots into a 30,327 square foot parcel and a Tentative Condominium Map to subdivide the proposed building into five condominium units. The project is located in the CAC (Chapin Avenue Commercial) zoning district within the Downtown Specific Plan.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Planning Commission review the proposed design changes, the responses to Planning Commission's March 24, 2025 comments, and proposed plaza spaces along Chapin Avenue and provide direction or design recommendations to be incorporated into the project to be brought back to the Planning Commission as an Action item for recommendation to the City Council.

BACKGROUND

The project site is an interior property with an existing commercial building (occupied by Chase Bank) and a surface parking lot. The applicant proposes to demolish the existing building and construct a new 87,172 square foot, five-story commercial building with two levels of below-grade parking. There will be a total of five commercial condominium spaces intended for professional office use. JP Morgan Chase Bank owns the property and would own and occupy most of the ground floor space in the new building. The ground floor condominium unit will also have an eating and drinking establishment. Banks and financial institutions, professional offices, and food establishment (restaurant) uses are some of the permitted uses allowed in the CAC zoning district.

This block of Chapin Avenue between El Camino Real and Primrose Road is unique as the front property lines for all lots along both sides of the street extend into the street. There is an approximately 19-foot easement in favor of the City of Burlingame in place that is not buildable and encompasses the sidewalk, curb, street trees, and a portion of the existing parallel parking spaces on Chapin Avenue.

The subject site is adjacent to an existing three-story office building to the south (1440 Chapin Avenue) which will be the location of the new City Hall and an existing two-story office building to the north (1424 Chapin Avenue). At the rear of the site and to the west, the zoning designation changes to R-4 (High

Density Residential) and is adjacent to two existing three-story multi-unit residential buildings (1435 and 1425 Bellevue Avenue). A culverted portion of Ralston Creek runs beneath 1435 Bellevue Avenue, approximately 120 feet from the rear property line of the subject property.

The Applicant is requesting the following applications for the proposed project:

- Amendment to the Downtown Specific Plan (Chapin Avenue Area) and Zoning Code (Chapin Avenue Commercial District) to increase the maximum allowed building height to 60 feet by right and up to 75 feet with a Special Permit (Municipal Code Chapter 25.96 and 25.80);
- Major Design Review for a new, five-story commercial building (Code Section 25.68.020.C.3.a);
- Special Permit for building height (74'-6" proposed where a Special Permit is required for a height between 60 and 75 feet with the proposed amendment for Code Section 25.10.030.); and
- Lot Merger and Tentative Condominium Map to combine the existing three lots and create five commercial condominium units, pursuant to Title 26 (Subdivisions).

ANALYSIS

At the March 24, 2025 Planning Commission hearing, the Planning Commission reviewed the proposed project as a study item and continued the item to a future meeting with several design suggestions to be incorporated into the project.

The Applicant has submitted revised plans, date stamped October 16, 2025, that have been simplified to focus on the proposed design changes. The previous plans are also attached to this report and can be referenced for more details of the proposed project. A written response to the Planning Commission's comments, and a slide deck were also provided. Below is a summary of the Commission's comments, the changes made to the project, and additional information provided by staff. Please refer to the attached written response and slide deck for more detailed responses and visual representations.

1. Address the massing and scale. Okay with the taller height on Chapin Avenue, but building needs more architectural detailing to break up the massing.

The design incorporates variable massing with a series of setbacks, atriums, and articulations. In particular, the front façade incorporates terraces and setbacks to read at the pedestrian scale as a two or three-story building. Pedestrians will experience the light and vertical landscaping of the atrium at the front of the building as it will be visible from the sidewalk area and from the publicly accessed eating and drinking establishment that occupies much of the sidewalk-facing frontage.

The revised elevations (Sheets A201 through A201) show both an elevation view and a massing representation. Slides 13-21 of the presentation illustrate the variable massing design techniques employed with the current design.

2. Come closer to the area's maximum allowable height limits and keep the same general proposed design.

The height of the building has not been altered from the originally proposed 74'-6". The Applicant states that in order to utilize the mass timber method of construction and to meet the minimum first floor ceiling height, the building would need to be completely redesigned using a standard construction plan, which would likely eliminate two stories of the building to meet the current

maximum allowed height of 55 feet. Redesigning the building from five stories to three stories would render the project economically infeasible.

The Applicant would like to keep the proposed height of the building with the request for the amendment to Downtown Specific Plan and Zoning Code height regulations for City Council consideration.

3. Consider a more tiered design approach on the sides to respect the neighbors.

The building design has been revised to provide roofed terrace cutouts, on both the east and west sides of the building on the second, third and fourth floors. The terraces measure approximately 240 to 285 square feet in size.

4. Have more ground-level interaction.

The Applicant has included plaza spaces in front of 1430 and 1440 Chapin Avenue as part of the proposed project that are discussed in further detail below under comment #6. The plaza spaces will work in concert with the atrium, ground-floor uses, and building's transparent design to create a blend of indoor and outdoor environments.

5. Consider having medians on Chapin Avenue.

A Feasibility Study of Chapin Avenue (Feasibility Study) was developed by the Public Works Department that analyzed possible streetscape improvements along Chapin Avenue between Primrose Road and El Camino Real. The streetscape design options underwent discussion and review by the public, the Traffic, Safety and Parking Commission, and City Council. At their meeting on May 17, 2021, City Council selected Alternative One in the Feasibility Study (page 5) as a concept plan for future streetscape improvements in the public right-of-way.

Alternative One shows medians located at the east end of Chapin Avenue, near the intersection of Primrose Road. Medians are not proposed for the west end of Chapin Avenue and not included in front of the subject site for several reasons, including the use of large vehicles and trucks for deliveries at BevMo! and Mollie Stone's Markets.

The medians, as well as other streetscape improvements, will be implemented through a Capital Improvement Project by the City as funding permits. The Applicant is only responsible for the frontage improvements in front of the project site and is voluntarily installing the plaza spaces.

6. Provide some pedestrian and public amenity.

The Applicant is voluntarily incorporating two plaza spaces along the Chapin Avenue street frontage as a public amenity. One 1,560 square foot plaza space would be built in front of the new building and a second 1,735 square foot plaza space would be built in front of the existing building at 1440 Chapin Avenue to provide a more prominent entrance and public space in front of the future City Hall location.

Portions of the existing on-street parking along Chapin Avenue will be converted into the plaza spaces. The design takes inspiration from the High Line in New York with its form, materials, and blending of hardscape and landscaping. The intent is to have to separate plaza spaces that are made to feel continuous through common design materials and proximity to each other. The

specified tree and plant palette has not been identified at this time but will be developed in coordination with the Parks Division and included in the revised plan set.

The plaza space in front of the future City Hall will be constructed by the developer but owned and maintained by the City. The plaza space in front of the proposed building will be owned and maintained by the developer/property owners. A use and maintenance agreement will be entered into between the City and property.

The Feasibility Study of Chapin Avenue shows the removal of parking spaces and some type of plaza space in front of the project site. However, no plaza space is shown in front of 1440 Chapin Avenue as this was not anticipated to be the future site of City Hall. Several parking spaces will need to be removed to accommodate the plaza space and will need to be reviewed by the Traffic, Safety and Parking Commission.

The Applicant would like feedback from the Planning Commission on the proposed plaza design concept and ideas prior to making further refinements and incorporating details to be included in the revised plan set to be brought back to the Planning Commission for action.

7. Address how window coverings are considered and the sun shaded in some logical way that it does not detract from the timber.

The building design incorporates built-in shading solutions and roll-down shades will be utilized inside the building.

8. Consider the visual obstruction created by the fins on the left side of the garage.

The fins remain in place as a structural element for the design. The Applicant indicates a silent alert system will be installed to notify both drivers and pedestrians of approaching vehicles at the garage entry. In addition, the design of the drive aisle includes contrasting paving materials to delineate pedestrian and vehicular zones.

The site design includes an approximately 15-foot long pedestrian island between the driveway entrance to the parking area of 1440 Chapin Avenue and the driveway entrance to the parking area for 1430 Chapin Avenue, which serves as a pedestrian break from vehicular traffic entering/ existing the two sites.

9. Provide a more detailed shadow study to show existing conditions.

A detailed shadow study for the proposed five-story building is provided on pages 47-52 of the slide deck. The proposed project does not cast shadow on any existing public or quasi/public open spaces in the vicinity and complies with Policy D-3.2 of the Downtown Specific Plan.

10. Provide a photo montage to show how the building is set with the neighboring structures and Chapin Avenue.

The two neighboring buildings at 1424 and 1440 Chapin Avenue are shown in the first rendering on Sheet G010.

11. Consider variable massing to come to an average building height that complies with the existing code height maximums.

While the proposed project seeks amendments to the Downtown Specific Plan and Zoning Code to increase the overall maximum building height in the CAC zoning district from 55 feet to 75 feet with a Special Permit, the building design includes variable massing as a principle of the design. Slides 13-21 of the slide deck provide a visual representation of the different breaks in massing of the building that soften the overall scale of the proposed building.

Variable massing is not a requirement or development standard within the Downtown Specific Plan or Zoning Code. The proposed design complies with or exceeds the required building setbacks for the CAC zoning district.

12. Address the lighting issues at nighttime given the amount of glass proposed.

The project will comply with Title 24 requirements that mandate light pollution control, including that lighting is required to shut off when not in use and fixtures must be energy efficient and directed downward to minimize nighttime light spill.

13. Want to see more landscaping at the street level.

The amount of landscaping at the ground floor has been substantially increased with the addition of the plaza spaces as described above. In addition, the atrium will incorporate landscaping and a living wall that are also visible from the ground floor.

Next Steps

Per Municipal Code Chapters 25.80 and 25.96, amendments to the Downtown Specific Plan and Zoning Code require City Council action with a recommendation from the Planning Commission. Municipal Code Section 25.62.020.B. requires multiple applications for the same project to be processed concurrently and acted on by the highest Review Authority designated by this Zoning Code for any of the applications, which in this case is the City Council. The Planning Commission will be a recommending review body for this project.

The project plans will be comprehensively updated and undergo final compliance review by staff. The project will be brought back to the Planning Commission for recommendation to the City Council on the various application types with accompanying environmental document.

Attachments:

Area Map
March 24, 2025 Study Session Staff Report
Responses to Planning Commission Comments
Slide Deck, dated November 2025
Feasibility Study of Chapin Avenue
Proposed Plans dated October 16, 2025
Previous Plans dated March 12, 2025