



CITY OF BURLINGAME PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

Agenda Item: 7d	Hearing Date: April 13, 2026
Project No.	CDSR25-0003
Location	218-222 Lorton Avenue APN: 029-211-180
Applicant and Property Owner	Robert MacPhee
Architect	Robert Medan, AIA
Staff	Emma Goldsmith, Associate Planner
General Plan Designation	Downtown Specific Plan
Zoning	Burlingame Avenue Commercial (BAC)
Lot Area	7,000 SF

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Review of an application for Major Design Review for exterior facade changes and a 395 square-foot addition to an existing 6,089 square-foot commercial building on a 7,000 square-foot site in the BAC (Burlingame Avenue Commercial) zoning district of the Downtown Specific Plan.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Planning Commission, by resolution, approve the Major Design Review application as conditioned.

BACKGROUND

The subject property is an interior lot on Lorton Avenue and contains a 6,089 square-foot commercial building. The commercial building consists of three tenant spaces, 218, 220, and 222 Lorton Avenue, as well as an existing warehouse/storage space at the rear with alley access off Hatch Lane. Only 218 and 222 Lorton Avenue are occupied by tenants, a salon and a barbershop, respectively.

The proposed project includes remodeling the front half of the building to combine two existing tenant spaces (218 and 220 Lorton Avenue) into one larger tenant space. In addition, combining the two units will enable access to the existing warehouse from Lorton Avenue as required by the Building Code. The project will result in an addition of 395 square feet, increasing the commercial building to 6,484 square feet.

Proposed exterior changes to the front building facade consist of removing the existing awnings, refinishing the facade, and enclosing the existing first floor covered entry. Proposed finishes for the new facade include cement plaster, manufactured concrete stone trim, and manufactured stone veneer cladding. New aluminum and glass storefront doors and a new folding glass and aluminum door will also be installed. In addition, the enclosed covered entry will be replaced with a downlit metal canopy to identify the pedestrian entrance. There are no changes proposed to the rear building facade.

Major Design Review is required for commercial buildings where there are changes to more than 50 percent of the front facade, including doors and windows (C.S. 25.68.020.C.3.d).

February 23, 2026, Planning Commission Meeting

At the Planning Commission study meeting on February 23, 2026, the Commission had a suggestion regarding the project and voted to place this item on the Action Calendar when all information has been submitted and reviewed by the Planning Division.

The applicant submitted revised plans, date stamped March 20, 2026, to address the Planning Commission's comments. Below is a summary of the Commission's comments and changes made to the project:

1. Concerned with the design of the tall opening on the right side of the façade (entry into tenant space at rear of building); it's not working together with the rest of the façade. Look for design opportunities that may add benefit to the overall aesthetic.
 - After further discussion with the property owner, the applicant would like to proceed with the design of the right-side entry as was initially proposed, without making any changes. As proposed, the right-side entry has a raised soffit, which contrasts with the dropped soffit at the neighboring two tenant spaces. The applicant notes that the tenant space is narrower than the adjacent two spaces, and the raised soffit also helps to further differentiate the space while making the entry less prominent and a more visually recessed entry relative to the other storefronts. This visual distinction is compatible with the use for the space, which is intended to accommodate a less-pedestrian oriented use, such as an office or workplace, which enables the two adjacent, pedestrian-oriented spaces to be featured more prominently.

ANALYSIS

Please note, this application was deemed complete prior to April 1, 2026, the effective date of the recently adopted Zoning Code Amendments, and therefore was reviewed under the previous Zoning Code. The analysis below provides information and development standard review based on the previous requirements.

The proposed project is reviewed for compliance with the development standards and requirements established in the Downtown Specific Plan and Municipal Code where applicable. There are no existing or proposed off-street parking spaces with this application. Pursuant to BMC 25.40.030.C, first floor uses within the Parking Sector of the Downtown Specific Plan are exempt from providing off-street parking. Any new exterior signage will be reviewed administratively under a separate permit.

The design of the building is reviewed based on the [Commercial Design Guidebook](#) and the standards established in Chapter 5 ([Design & Character](#)) in the Downtown Specific Plan. Section 5.2 of the Downtown Specific Plan provides design guidelines specifically for commercial and mixed-use areas. Section 5.4 provides more general design guidelines that apply to all areas of the downtown. The applicable sections are included below.

5.2.3 Architectural Design Consistency

- [5.2.3.1 Facade Design](#) - To maintain the present scale and character of buildings in Downtown, large uninterrupted expanses of horizontal and vertical wall surface should be avoided. Building façades should respond to the relatively narrow increments of development (15 to 50 feet) with variation in fenestration, building materials and/or building planes. Facades should have generous

reveals such as inset doorways and windows. Doors, windows, and details should be in keeping with pedestrian scale, as opposed to a monumental scale that is out of proportion to the surrounding context. Design details should be authentic and have purpose, rather than being applied or strictly decorative. Facades should have a variation of both positive space (massing) and negative space (plazas, inset doorways and windows). Facades on both new and rehabilitated buildings should include the elements that make up a complete storefront including doors, display windows, bulkheads, signage areas and awnings.

- 5.2.3.2 Windows - Windows are important for providing "eyes on the street" and enlivening streetscapes. Building walls should be punctuated by well-proportioned openings that provide relief, detail and variation on the façade. Windows should be inset from the building wall to create shade and shadow detail. The use of high-quality window products that contribute to the richness and detail of the façade is encouraged. Reflective glass is considered an undesirable material because of its tendency to create uncomfortable glare conditions and a forbidding appearance. The use of materials that are reflected in the historic architecture present in the Downtown area is encouraged.
- 5.2.3.2 Display Windows - Display windows should be designed to enliven the street and provide pedestrian views into the interior of the storefront. Size, division and shape of display windows should maintain the established rhythm of the streetscape. Glass used in the display windows should be clear so it is possible to see inside, and display cases that block views into stores are strongly discouraged. Noticeably tinted glazing is discouraged and mirrored/reflective glass is not permitted.
- 5.2.3.3 Materials - Building materials should be richly detailed to provide visual interest; reference should be made to materials used in notable examples of historic Downtown architecture. Metal siding and large expanses of stucco or wood siding are also to be avoided, except in the Myrtle Mixed Use area. Roofing materials and accenting features such as canopies, cornices, and tile accents should also offer color variation. Character and richness in Downtown can be enhanced from the incorporation of details and ornamentation into the design of the buildings. These elements can include elements that have been traditionally used such as cornices, brackets or moldings.

In addition, Municipal Code Section 25.68.060.E. establishes the criteria for Major Design Review for Commercial, Industrial, and Mixed-Use Zoning Districts as follows:

1. For mixed-use developments having two-thirds or more of the total gross floor area dedicated to residential use, compliance with the objective design standards adopted by ordinance or resolution;
2. Support of the pattern of diverse architectural styles in the area in which the project is located;
3. Respect and promotion of pedestrian activity in commercial and mixed-use zoning districts by placement of buildings to maximize commercial use of the street frontage and by locating off-street parking areas so that they do not dominate street frontages;
4. For commercial and industrial developments on visually prominent and gateway sites, whether the design fits the site and is compatible with the surrounding development;
5. Compatibility of the architecture with the mass, bulk, scale, and existing materials of surrounding development and appropriate transitions to adjacent lower-intensity development and uses;

6. Architectural design consistency by using a single architectural style on the site that is consistent among primary elements of the structure and restores or retains existing or significant original architectural features;
7. Provision of site features such as fencing, landscaping, and pedestrian circulation that complement on-site development and enhance the aesthetic character of district in which the development is located.

In general, the proposed façade changes meet the design guidelines established in the Downtown Specific Plan and the Commercial Design Guidebook.

The building frontage clearly identifies tenant spaces and breaks up each space appropriately. The total façade is less than 50 feet in width and is articulated with a mix of materials and entry doors and windows that are generously inset from the primary building façade, providing a variation of both positive space (massing) and negative space (inset doorways and windows). The size of the doors, windows, and details are pedestrian scale and in proportion with the surrounding building storefronts. Each tenant space is visually divided by the two coffered elements above the awnings, which also function to break up the upper wall plane. The recessed entry to the space at the rear of the building also provides variation in the wall plane and further emphasizes the primary commercial tenant spaces. In addition, the proposed elevations also identify future locations for proposed signage. The proposed exterior façade changes create a complete and articulated storefront, meeting design guideline 5.2.3.1 - Facade Design of the Downtown Specific Plan.

The proposed awning and staggered entries create the visual impression of a recessed window plane and provide shade and shadow detail. The storefront windows and accordion-style doors with inset glazing are designed to enliven the street and provide pedestrian views into the interior of the storefront. The proposed aluminum clad doors and windows are of high-quality that contribute to the richness and detail of the façade. The size and height of the entry doors and windows are of a pedestrian scale because they do not extend all the way to the bottom of the awning. Therefore, the proposed façade changes meet design guideline 5.2.3.2 - Windows of the Downtown Specific Plan. Lastly, the proposed project uses varied materials, colors, and treatments to provide visual interest. The main structure is finished with a white plaster but creates contrast with the dark aluminum window trim and awnings. In addition, the structure utilizes the manufactured concrete stone trim and cladding to create finished appearance in accordance with design guideline 5.2.3.3 – Materials of the Downtown Specific Plan.

Environmental Review

The project is Categorically Exempt from review pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), per Section 15301 - Existing facilities, Class 1(e) of the CEQA Guidelines, which states that additions to existing structures that do not result in an increase of more than 50 percent of the floor area of the structure before the addition, or 2,500 square feet, whichever is less, are exempt from environmental review.

Attachments:

Area Map
Resolution
Renderings
Proposed Plans dated March 20, 2026
Previous Plans dated February 9, 2026