



CITY OF BURLINGAME PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

Agenda Item: 7b	Hearing Date: January 12, 2026
Project No.	CDSR25-0001
Location	900 Peninsula Avenue APN: 029-244-070
Applicant	Alan Cross
Property Owner	Putnam Automotive Group
Staff	Brittany Xiao, Assistant Planner
General Plan Designation	Downtown Specific Plan
Zoning	MMU (Myrtle Road Mixed-Use)
Lot Area	0.96 acres

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Review of an application for Major Design Review for exterior facade changes to an existing 67,566 square foot commercial building on a 0.96 acre site in the MMU (Myrtle Road Mixed-Use) Zoning District.

RECOMMENDATION

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

BACKGROUND

The subject property is located at the corner of Anita Road and Peninsula Avenue and contains an existing two-story commercial building currently occupied by Putnam Volvo Dealership. The first floor of the building contains a showroom, sales offices, automobile servicing area, and covered parking. The second floor of the building contains additional offices, a storage area for automobile parts, uncovered parking and automobile storage.

The proposed project includes façade changes to the existing commercial building and remodeling the sales office and automobile service area on the first floor. The proposed façade changes include replacing the existing fascia cladding on the overhang over the storefront with aluminum composite material paneling, replacing the existing aluminum and glazing paneling on the storefront with etched glass curtain walls and glass panels, and replacing the existing cement plaster entry portal at the store front with a new entry portal finished in oak veneer.

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

August 11, 2025 Planning Commission Meeting

At the Planning Commission study meeting on August 11, 2025, the Planning Commission requested that the applicant address the suggestions by staff outlined in the staff report and voted to place this item on Regular Action when all information has been submitted and reviewed.

The applicant submitted revised plans, date stamped November 24, 2025. Below is a summary of the design suggestions and the changes made to the project:

1. The vehicle showroom area along the West Elevation (facing the railroad tracks) contains an etched glass curtain wall, creating a prominent blank wall along Peninsula Avenue. A design element should be considered to break up this wall.
 - An entry portal (clear window into the showroom) was added on the West Elevation to match the entry portals on the other building facades (see revised sheets A.003 and A.301). Along the West Elevation, a planter wall was added and the low lying shrubbery and small pebbles feature was extended to this building façade (see revised sheets A.003 and A.201).
2. The pedestrian entrance to the building is not well-defined. A design element, such as a metal awning, should be considered to better identify the pedestrian entrance.
 - After further discussion with the property owner and Volvo, they feel the primary customer entry portal, consisting of an element extending 3'-0" from the exterior wall and wrapped in oak veneer, is appropriately scaled with appropriate signage. The applicant notes that the majority of customers arrive via vehicle (as opposed to pedestrians walking along Peninsula Avenue) and feel that the primary entry will be evident and clear when arriving in this fashion. The applicant provided photos from three other similar installations for reference (see attached).

ANALYSIS

The project is reviewed for compliance with the development standards and requirements established in the Downtown Specific Plan and Municipal Code where applicable. The existing vehicle sales and service use is considered existing, legal nonconforming. No additional parking is required since there is no intensification of the use. 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. 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; and

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, Commercial Design Guidebook, and Municipal Code.

The addition of an entry portal, planter wall, a living wall, and low-lying shrubbery and hardscape material changes to the street facing facades of the building enhance the public realm. Although the storefront windows are being reduced in size, the glass entry portals are well-proportioned and function as display windows by allowing pedestrians and drivers on Peninsula Avenue to see into the interior of the vehicle showroom space meeting design guideline 5.2.3.2 - Display Windows of the Downtown Specific Plan.

The proposed exterior façade changes utilize varied materials, including aluminum composite panels, etched and clear glass, and oak veneer elements and colors such as dark blue, light grey, white, and light brown to create visual interest for the commercial building in accordance with design guideline 5.2.3.3 - Materials of the Downtown Specific Plan.

Lastly, the proposed changes maintain the existing variation in fenestration of the storefront including the octagonal awning and inset entry portals, avoiding a large, interrupted expanse of horizontal and vertical wall surfaces in accordance with design guideline 5.2.3.1 - Facade Design of the Downtown Specific Plan.

Staff does not have any further suggested changes for the Planning Commission to consider.

Environmental Review

The project is Categorically Exempt from review pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), per Section 15301 - Existing facilities, Class 1(a) of the CEQA Guidelines, which states that interior or exterior alterations involving such things as interior partitions, plumbing, and electrical conveyances are exempt from environmental review.

Attachments:

Area Map
Photos Submitted by Applicant
Resolution
Proposed Plans dated November 24, 2025
Previous Plans dated June 23, 2025