



MEMORANDUM

Date: 9/15/2016
To: Planning Commission
From: David Hogan, Contract Planner
Re: Commonwealth Corporate Center, 162 and 164 Jefferson Drive - Review of Minor Modification to the Approved Plans

The owner of the Commonwealth Corporate Center, The Sobrato Organization, and tenant (EMC) are proposing a modification to the project to allow the construction of a central utility plant to provide additional building cooling to accommodate proposed server and laboratory areas.

Section 6 of the approved Conditional Development Permit (CDP) for the Commonwealth Corporate Center establishes the processes for making modifications to an approved project. After reviewing the proposed modifications to the project, staff believes that the proposed modifications to the project constitute a Minor Modification as defined in Section 6.1.2 as provided below:

“Minor Modifications are reviewed at the staff level, but the Planning Commission is provided information regarding these modifications. The determination as to whether a requested change is a Minor Modification is determined by the Community Development Director (in his/her reasonable discretion). A Minor Modification is similar in nature to a Substantially Consistent Modification, except that Minor Modifications generally are visible to the public and result in minor exterior changes to the Project aesthetics. Any member of the Commission may request within seven (7) days of receipt of the informational notice that the item(s) be reviewed by the Planning Commission.”

This memorandum discusses the proposal in more detail. As noted in the Section 6.1.2 excerpt above, any Planning Commissioner may request that the item be added to the agenda of a future Planning Commission meeting for further discussion of the item.

Background

The Commonwealth Corporate Center project was approved by the City Council in 2014. The Commonwealth Corporate Center Project consists of two 129,929-square foot, four-story office buildings adjacent to US 101 and the Dumbarton Rail Corridor. The August 19, 2014 City Council staff report (which includes the Planning Commission staff report) and minutes are available through the links provided below.

Staff report

<http://menlopark.org/DocumentCenter/View/4945>

Minutes

<http://www.menlopark.org/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Minutes/08192014-2402>

In October 24, 2014, a substantial conformance memorandum was sent to the Planning Commission to review the expanded size of the pedestrian plaza area adjacent to the proposed buildings. The size of the approved buildings and the number of required parking spaces did not change with this substantial conformance determination. The Planning Commission declined to pull the item for discussion, so these revisions were approved by staff. The substantial conformance memo is available through the link provided below.

Previous substantial conformance memo

<http://www.menlopark.org/DocumentCenter/View/5630>

Proposed Revisions

The applicant is requesting a change to the project to allow the construction of a central utility plant consisting of two utility enclosures. The project plans are included as Attachment A, and include relevant sheets in both the approved and proposed configurations.

The enclosures would be located in the southeastern portion of the site, next to the Dumbarton Rail Corridor, and would feature 11-foot solid walls capped with additional screening elements. The applicant has stated that the utility enclosures are necessary for the cooling of electronics associated with the tenant that has leased the building. The building tenant was not identified until after the building shell was under construction.

The lower and larger of the two proposed enclosures would incorporate a three-foot-tall dark metal screen with a capping element that is similar in design to the roof top crown element of the main building. The taller and smaller cooling tower enclosure would be capped with an 8.5-foot dark metal screen which would conceal the equipment inside without giving the appearance of a massive structure. In addition, although the two enclosures would be 15.6 and 19.6 feet tall (including the screen portions), visibility of these features would be limited by their location on the site. Views of the enclosures from Highway 101 would be blocked by vegetation, distance, and grade. Visibility from Kelly Park, across the Dumbarton Rail Corridor, would be limited by existing trees and shrubs.

The adjustments to the site plan also include minor modifications to the existing parking lot, to provide replacement parking for the spaces displaced by the utility enclosures, and the expansion of the parking area adjacent to Jefferson Drive into the area currently occupied by the basketball court/recreation area. The total number of provided parking spaces (868) would continue to comply with the CDP. The project also includes the installation of additional security lighting and security cameras along the walking path behind the utility enclosures.

The applicant has also worked with the Public Works Department to ensure that the proposed central utility plant will not exceed the projected water use identified in the Environmental Impact Report (EIR). When recycled water is available, the project will be connected to that system.

Staff Review

Staff has determined that the changes to the project plans may be considered a Minor Modification as defined by the CDP, based on the following:

- The location of the buildings and main access drive, as approved by the City Council, are not changing.
- The enhanced walking trails directed by the Planning Commission are not changing. Additional lighting and security cameras will be installed along the walking path adjacent to the utility enclosures.
- The architecture and materials identified for the approved buildings are not changing.
- The previously expanded and enhanced pedestrian amenities around the main buildings are not changing.
- The required number of parking spaces is not being reduced.
- The proposed modifications conform to the Project identified in the Environmental Impact Report and the approved Conditional Development Permit.
- The design of the proposed utility enclosures incorporates similar elements and, colors, and finishes with the main buildings. The use of semi-transparent screens reduces the apparent size of the structures while concealing the equipment within the enclosures.
- The location of the proposed utility structures, adjacent to the Dumbarton Rail Corridor, is not highly visible from adjacent streets and will be screened by both on-site and off-site landscaping (along the Dumbarton Corridor and in Kelly Park).

Planning Commission Review

If any member of the Commission would like to discuss the changes to the plans described above, please notify staff no later than 5:30 pm on Thursday, September 22, 2016. If staff does not receive a request from a Planning Commissioner, there will be no further review and staff will proceed with processing the described modifications as part of the building permit application. If any member of the Commission makes such a request, the item would be placed on the agenda at a future meeting as a regular business item to give the full Commission the opportunity to review the proposed modifications as outlined in Section 6.1.2 of the approved CDP. No additional materials beyond what is contained in this memorandum would be prepared for the agenda item.

If you have questions about the project or process, please contact David Hogan at dwhogan@menlopark.org.

Attachments

- A. Revised Plans (includes the approved and proposed plans)

