



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT STAFF REPORT

DATE: OCTOBER 27, 2020
TO: DESIGN COMMISSION
FROM: DAVID M. REYES, DIRECTOR, PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
SUBJECT: PRELIMINARY CONSULTATION - NEW CONSTRUCTION OF A THREE-STORY 80,000 SQUARE FOOT LABORATORY BUILDING
REZNIK SUSTAINABILITY RESOURCE CENTER
1200 E. CALIFORNIA BOULEVARD (CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY)

Project Description:

This proposal is for the construction of a new three-story-plus-basement, approximately 80,000-square-foot laboratory building (Reznik Sustainability Resource Center) at 1200 E. California Boulevard (California Institute of Technology). The specific site of the building is on the east side of S. Wilson Avenue, between Del Mar Boulevard and San Pasqual Street. Adjacent buildings along S. Wilson Avenue within the Caltech campus are the Beckman Institute building (1989, Albert C. Martin & Associates) and adjoining lawn, and the Braun Laboratory (1982, C.F. Braun & Co.). The existing Mead Laboratory (1981, John Kewell Associates) is proposed to be demolished to accommodate the proposed new building. There are also 16 trees in the immediate vicinity of the site that are proposed to be removed. At this time, staff does not have sufficient information to determine if any of the trees proposed to be removed are protected. There are two street trees adjacent to the proposed site and one on-site tree in the yard area in front of the proposed building that would be retained.

In addition to the flanking buildings mentioned above, other nearby Caltech buildings include the Broad Center for Biological Studies (2002, Pei Cobb Freed & Partners) and the Chen Neuroscience Research Building (2020, Smithgroup JJR) to the north, the Church Laboratory (1955, Stiles O. Clements), Alles Laboratory (1960, Caltech Physical Plant), and Kerckhoff Laboratory (1928, Mayers, Murray & Phillip) to the south, two large parking structures and two smaller single-family residences to the west, and the Noyes Laboratory (1967, Risley, Gould & Van Heuklyn) and Schlinger Laboratory (2010, Bohlin Cywinski Jackson) to the east. Nearby designated historic resources include Villa San Pasqual (1953, Lionel V. Mayell) at 1000 San Pasqual Street, Whispering Waters (1961, Lionel V. Mayell) at 1000 Cordova Street, Mentor Court (1923, Delux Building Company) at 937 E. California Boulevard and Bullocks South Lake (1947, Wurdeman & Beckett) at 401 S. Lake Avenue. The property at 1031 San Pasqual Street (recently relocated Wilson Court) is currently pending landmark designation. The site is zoned PS (Public/Semi-Public).

The new building is proposed to be set back 90 feet from South Wilson Avenue and 30 feet from the Braun Laboratory to the south. The proposed setbacks from the Beckman Lawn to the north and the Noyes Laboratory to the east are not indicated in the drawings, but are substantially narrower than these. The design appears to incorporate the existing undulating front yard condition of the site, which is somewhat unique along the existing streetscape, including creation of an angled driveway to a loading area at the south end of the west (Wilson Avenue) elevation that would largely be screened from public view by the elevated hill in front of it. An existing driveway along the north side of the building is proposed to remain.

The floor plans provided depict, at the first floor, open collaboration spaces along most of the outer perimeter with meeting rooms and laboratories in the center and support/back-of-house spaces along the south and east edges, including a freight/receiving area at the southwest corner. Building entries are shown at the north end of the west (street-facing) elevation and the eastern end of the north and south facades. Vertical circulation is proposed to occur at a large communicating stair at roughly center of the north side of the building, two elevators and an enclosed stair at the northeast corner, and one elevator and enclosed stair at the southwest corner. The second and third floor plans depict laboratories and meeting rooms at the center of the floors and storage rooms, mechanical shafts, restrooms and other similar spaces along the south and east edges. The roof plan depicts outdoor gathering spaces, a solar roof testing laboratory, skylights and a large mechanical penthouse.

The building is designed in a contemporary/organic style with a flat roof, an undulating curtain-wall system with an angular mass timber structure along the north and west sides of the building and at the southeast corner, which peels away at the ground floor entries. There is a roof canopy feature that extends beyond a mechanical penthouse enclosure, while remaining behind the outer building envelope. The south and east facades are in close proximity to other existing adjacent buildings and not significantly visible to the public; however, these corners are the location of the building's elevators. The southwest corner elevator presents as a rectilinear terminus to the undulating curtain-wall system; by contrast, the curtain-wall system wraps the exterior of the northeast elevators.

Applicable Design Guidelines:

- Design-Related Goals and Policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan
- Caltech Master Plan

Previous/Existing Entitlements:

- None.

Approvals Needed/Project Scheduling:

- Concept and Final Design Review (Design Commission)
- Building Permits (Building Staff)

CEQA Clearance:

This is preliminary consultation only and is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Staff Observations:

Applicable Design Guidelines:

The following design guidelines are applicable to the project and should guide further development and study of the project as it moves forward in the design review process:

Design-Related Policies in the Land Use Element of the General Plan:

- 4.11: Require that development demonstrates a contextual relationship with neighboring structures and sites addressing such elements as building scale, massing, orientation, setbacks, buffering, the arrangement of shared and private open spaces, visibility, privacy, automobile and truck access, impacts of noise and lighting, landscape quality, infrastructure, and aesthetics.
- 7.1: Design each building as a high-quality, long term addition to the City's urban fabric; exterior design and buildings material shall exhibit permanence and quality, minimize maintenance concerns, and extend the life of the building.
- 7.2: Allow for the development of a diversity of buildings styles. Support innovative and creative design solutions to issues related to context and environmental sustainability.
- 7.3: Require that new and adaptively re-used buildings are designed to respect and complement the defining built form, massing, scale, modulation, and architectural detailing of their contextual setting.
- 10.7: Encourage sustainable practices for landscape materials, landscape design, and land development.
- 23.3: Provide appropriate setbacks, consistent with the surrounding neighborhood, along the street frontage and, where there are setbacks, ensure adequate landscaping is provided.
- 25.4: Require that new development protect community character by providing architecture, landscaping, and urban design of equal or greater quality than existing and by respecting the architectural character and scale of adjacent buildings.

Caltech Master Plan:

- Buildings north of the San Pasqual alignment should be designed in accordance with the principles that have made the campus so successful thus far. These principles do not imply architectural monotony but rather an active engagement with the present. That is, after all, Caltech's mission - to be building into the future using the wisdom of the past. In the spirit of this mission, buildings should be designed as imaginative architectural visions, whether contemporary in design or reminiscent of the original buildings. However, they should also be designed as part of a larger whole to be interconnected with hardscape or landscape bordered courtyards, paths and open spaces.

- New buildings should be designed in accordance with the same principles for siting, massing, size, scale, and open space that guided the design of buildings at the original campus bounded by San Pasqual Street, California Boulevard, Wilson Avenue and Hill Avenue.
- New buildings should be designed to be compatible with the massing, scale, architectural treatment, and materials of nearby buildings and places.
- New buildings should not be designed in isolation, but address and seek to unify the architectural character of surrounding buildings.
- At the edges of the campus, the design of buildings should seek compatibility with the surrounding urban context, while contributing to a unified campus-wide image and character.

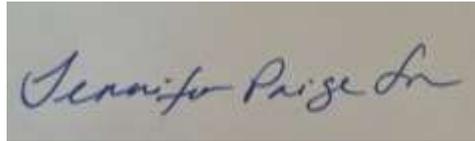
Potential Design Issues:

- Continue to study ways to further accentuate the building entries.
- Explore ways to unify the building with the character of surrounding buildings, while retaining the unique expression and sustainability features that relate to the activities that will take place within it. Incorporation of movement in the west façade curtain-wall, similar to the north façade treatment, and studying the proportions of these movements to respond to surrounding buildings, could be an effective means of achieving this goal. Provide diagrams and studies to demonstrate how the design responds to the surrounding context.
- Continue to study the terminus of the curtain-wall at the southwest corner, including possible further engagement with the elevator tower.
- Continue to refine the loading/receiving area treatment to ensure it is visually screened from street view and as integrated as possible into the overall design character of the building.
- For Concept Design Review, provide a tree inventory that accurately and clearly indicates the species and size of all trees in the vicinity of the construction site. Private Tree Removal permits may be required if any trees proposed to be removed are protected by the Tree Protection Ordinance. Any protected trees proposed to be retained in the vicinity of the construction site will also require a Tree Protection Plan to identify protection measures to be installed prior to and during construction and ensure compliance with the City's tree protection requirements.

Project Scheduling/Sequencing:

- Concept and Final Design Review by the Design Commission
- Building Permits

Respectfully Submitted,



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Reviewed by:



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Attachments:

- A. Master Plan compliance matrix
- B. Applicant submittal package