



**CITY OF SOUTH PASADENA  
Planning Commission & Design Review Board  
Special Joint Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, September 20, 2023, 6:30 PM  
Amedee O. "Dick" Richards Jr. Council Chambers  
1424 Mission Street, South Pasadena, CA 91030**

**CALL TO ORDER:**

A Special Joint Meeting of the South Pasadena Planning Commission and Design Review Board was called to order by Planning Commission Vice-Chair Padilla on Wednesday, September 20, 2023 at 6:30 p.m. The meeting was held at 1424 Mission Street, South Pasadena, California.

**ROLL CALL:**

**Planning Commission:**

**Present:** Vice-Chair: Lisa Padilla  
Commissioners: Amitabh Barthakur, John Lesak and Arnold Swanborn

**Absent:** Chair: Laura Dahl

**Design Review Board:**

**Present:** Chair: Brian Nichols  
Vice-Chair: Melissa Hon Tsai  
Commissioners: Samantha Hill and Kay Younger

**Absent:** Board Member: Joe Carlson

**City Staff**

**Present:** Alison Becker, Community Development Deputy Director  
Matt Chang, Planning Manager  
Dean Flores, Senior Planner  
Sandra Robles, Associate Planner

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA:**

**Approved, 4-0.**

**DISCLOSURE OF SITE VISITS AND EX-PARTE CONTACTS:**

Commissioner Swanborn and Commissioner Lesak met with Staff and Consultant as part of an Ad Hoc Committee working on the Downtown Specific Plan (DTSP).

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

**1. Public Comment – General (Non-Agenda Items).**

(Via Zoom) Victor Tang, Developer for 181 Monterey Road, spoke about written comments he submitted expressing concern about the hillside overlay for the area.

Vice-Chair Padilla noted that Dwight Bond, a local architect, had also submitted written comments.

**DISCUSSION:**

**2. Draft Objective Development Standards (ODS) Project.**

**Recommendation:**

Receive a presentation from AECOM (City consultant) regarding the Draft Objective Development Standards, receive comments from the general public, and provide comments and directions to Staff and the City consultant.

**Staff Presentation:**

Planning Manager Chang introduced Susan Ambrosini, City Consultant AECOM Urban Planner and Project Manager, who presented a PowerPoint presentation.

**Questions for Staff:**

The Commissioners, Board Members, Staff and Consultant had a robust discussion regarding ministerial versus discretionary project approvals, discrepancies between the Draft received by the Commission/Board and the slide show and illustrations presented tonight, and whether any cities had test driven these standards.

Deputy Director Becker explained the purpose of the Objective Development Standards (ODS) was to make it easy for people to secure an approval of their projects, and that the standards are a minimum of what is expected.

Vice-Chair Padilla acknowledged that it is a sea change for every city across the entire State. She remarked that every city is having to adapt to a very different set of priorities that have been set at the State level.

**Questions from Design Review Board:**

DRB members, Consultant and Staff discussed the variations between mixed-use and multi-family standards depicted in the Draft, specifically the residential standards of mixed-use projects. Consultant Ambrosini remarked this was an error, and the Draft has since been corrected. They also discussed ADA requirements and the Zoning Map.

Deputy Director Becker remarked that the purpose of the standards is to facilitate administrative ministerial review of projects and clarified the difference between a waiver and a concession. She also noted that recommendations to update the ODS can be made at any time.

The Planning Commissioners, DRB Members and Consultant Ambrosini discussed the intent of the ODS is to be general enough to apply to all construction types and will also be reviewed for ADA compliance. The CALGreen Building Code is usually referenced to address sustainability concerns. They also discussed including a streamlined process for signage.

**Public Comments:**

(via Zoom) Lisa Campbell asked about vinyl windows and setbacks – a comment on one of the slides during the presentation.

(via Zoom) Victor Tang asked how many units would trigger a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) study and whether a CEQA study is needed for affordable housing would go to the Planning Commission.

**Discussion:**

Commissioner Lesak discussed several items, including: the challenge of reviewing the Draft as information for an item is spread across several different sources; defining primary streets and secondary streets; materials standards; shop fronts (including galleries and arcades); security bars; the strong emphasis on horizontal orientation in the diagrams; concern regarding mandating screening around mechanical equipment; and structured parking.

Deputy Director Becker suggested (i) Staff could create a shared document among the Planning Commission, DRB and Staff, and (ii) creation of an ad hoc committee for each group.

The Commissioners and Board Members discussed the focus of the ODS on exterior aesthetics and suggested additional considerations, including material performance (i.e., sustainability), the relationship of interiors to exteriors, surface parking, the importance of landscaping, trees and green space, including a suggestion to create a red list of materials that would not be allowed.

Consultant Ambrosini clarified some of the misunderstandings evidenced by the comments and addressed a specific question about rooflines.

Board member Younger spoke about encouraging developers to stay within the design parameters of South Pasadena's traditional look, recognizing that there is quite a variety of architecture in South Pasadena.

The group discussed that the ODS are not stylistic and are going to be effectively ministerially approved through the Planning Department.

Vice-Chair Padilla remarked that it is beneficial for both bodies meeting together and thanked her colleagues and Consultant Ambrosini and AECOM for quickly addressing her comments after the last session.

Deputy Director Becker proposed that the DRB and the Planning Commission consider the ODS separately and then share their recommendations (as advised by the City Attorney). She presented several options and reminded the Commissioners and Board Members that time with the AECOM team is ending.

Consultant Ambrosini acknowledged that the AECOM team could do one more refinement to the Draft to integrate comments and updates from tonight's meeting and outlined the process.

Deputy Director Becker provided a timeline and remarked that if prioritized, the ODS could be in-process toward the end of the year.

Vice-Chair Padilla suggested Commissioners send their specific comments to the DTSP Ad Hoc Committee of Commissioners Lesak and Swanborn. Upon finishing their work on the Downtown Specific Plan in about two weeks, they will consider the Commissioners' input.

Chair Nichols and Board Member Hill stated the DRB would form an Ad Hoc Committee and work with the Planning Commission's schedule. Board member Hill asked about additional public comments.

Board members Hill and Tsai volunteered to serve on the DRB Ad Hoc Committee.

Commissioner Barthakur suggested Staff engage a focus group with architects and developers to obtain feedback on the final Draft after getting comments from the DRB and Planning Commission.

Consultant Ambrosini reviewed the SCAG team timeline, indicating that the deadline for the project is the end of December. If an updated Draft is released in

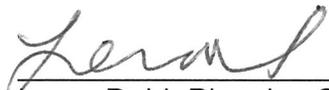
the next few days, then a month from tonight would be fine to receive the group's input.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

3. **Planning Commission:**  
**Adjournment to the Regular Planning Commission meeting scheduled for October 10, 2023 at 6:30 pm:**

**Design Review Board:**  
**Adjournment to the Regular Design Review Board meeting scheduled for October 5, 2023 at 6:30 pm:**

There being no further matters, Vice-Chair Padilla and Chair Nichols adjourned the meeting at 8:46 p.m.

  
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Laura Dahl, Planning Commission Chair

  
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Brian Nichols, Design Review Board Chair