



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PLANNING CODE TEXT AMENDMENT, CONDITIONAL USE AUTHORIZATION & VARIANCE

HEARING DATE: SEPTEMBER 9, 2021

90-Day Deadline: When the 90-day review period ends or the new expiration date from an extension resolution

Case Number: 2016-015987PCACUAVAR

Project Address: 1750 Van Ness Avenue

Zoning: RC-4 (Residential-Commercial, High-Density) Zoning District
80-D Height and Bulk District
Van Ness Avenue Area Plan
Van Ness Special Use District

Block/Lot: 0646/003

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Property Owner: American Buddhist Cultural Society
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Reviewed by: Elizabeth Gordon-Jonckheer, Manager, Northwest Quadrant, Current Planning
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Recommendation: Approval

Planning Code Amendment

The proposed Ordinance would amend the Van Ness SUD (Planning Code Section 243) to exempt the subject property from the required 3:1 ratio of residential uses to non-residential uses in association with a project that proposes to demolish the existing two-story Religious Institutional building and construct a new six-story-over-basement Religious Institutional building.

The Way It Is Now:

The Van Ness SUD (Planning Code Section 243(c)(8)(A)) requires that in newly constructed structures, nonresidential uses shall only be permitted if the ratio between the amount of net additional occupied floor area for residential uses to the amount of occupied floor area for nonresidential uses in excess of the occupied floor area of structures existing on the site at the time the project is approved is 3 to 1 or greater.

The Way It Would Be:

The property at 1750 Van Ness Ave, Lot 019 in Assessor's Block 0622, would be exempt from the limitations of non-residential uses in the Van Ness Special Use District.

Project Description

The Project proposes the demolition of the existing 28,806 square-foot, two-story religious institutional building and the construction of a new six-story-over-basement Religious Institutional building (dba San Bao Temple) totaling approximately 40,687 gross square feet. On the ground floor, the Project proposes a retail bookstore and art gallery measuring approximately 1,185 square feet fronting Van Ness Avenue, and kitchen and dining facilities at the rear for communal dining offered services and events. On the second floor, a shrine area with seating for up to 300 members, two classrooms, and a lecture hall are proposed. At the third floor, the Project would feature a classroom along the Van Ness Avenue frontage, a landscaped outdoor roof deck featuring a meditation garden, as well as an enclosed meditation room at the rear, directly above and open to the main shrine area. In support of the Religious Institutional use, the Project would also provide three floors containing 30 private, no-cost efficiency dormitory rooms for short-term use by attendees of Temple events, monastics, scholars, and visiting volunteers engaged in supportive activity for the Temple. The Project will include one below-grade level with seven (7) off-street vehicular parking spaces and 18 Class One bicycle parking spaces, accessed from an existing curb cut along Clay Street.

Environmental Review

The proposed amendments are not defined as a project under CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(c) and 15378 because they do not result in a physical change in the environment.

The Project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") as a Class 32 categorical exemption.

Issues and Considerations

Implementation

The Department has determined that this ordinance will not impact our current implementation procedures.

Design Review Comments

The project has changed in the following significant ways since the original submittal to the Department:

- o Reduction of approximately 2,036 square feet of gross floor area;
- o Reduction of rooftop mechanical penthouse from 13 feet in height to 4 feet in height;

- o Increase of ground floor façade transparency;

General Plan Compliance

Van Ness Avenue is the primary central north-south spine and is one of the widest streets in the City. It provides access between a number of focal points, including landmark buildings, cultural centers, important view corridors and the Bay. The Project will reinforce the existing pattern of large, monumental structures with fine-grain urban fabric by constructing an attractive new temple, retaining and expanding the long-standing Religious Institutional use. The Project has been thoughtfully designed to respect the scale and character of development in the neighborhood and to maximize light and air to adjacent developments and sidewalks. The building will reach a maximum height of 74 feet, which is consistent with the underlying 80-D Height and Bulk District and represents an appropriate scale of development along the notably wide Van Ness Avenue.

The Project site is easily accessible via numerous public transit options, including the Van Ness BRT, which is nearing completion. The existing San Bao Temple has operated for nearly 20 years at this site, with many visitors, scholars and monastics walking, biking, or utilizing public transit. Future visitors to the new temple are expected to continue using these modes of transportation. On balance, the Project is consistent with the Objectives and Policies of the General Plan.

Public Comment

The Department has received 26 letters in support of the proposed project, including one from the Van Ness Corridor Neighborhoods Council and one from St. Luke's Episcopal Church, which is immediately to the north of the subject property. The Department has also received correspondence in opposition to the project from the homeowner's association for the adjacent condominium building directly to the south of the subject property. The opposition expressed concerns over the project's massing and its adverse effects on light and air for the residents of the building, as well as the project's lack of housing.

Required Commission Action

The proposed Ordinance is before the Commission so that it may approve it, reject it, or approve it with modifications.

In order for the Project to proceed, the Commission must grant a Conditional Use Authorization, pursuant to Planning Code Sections 155(r), 209.3, 253, 253.2 and 303 to permit the retention of a curb cut on a transit-preferential street, to permit a non-residential use greater than 6,000 square feet, to permit a height greater than 50 feet and to permit an Institutional use as part of a project that would demolish the existing two-story Religious Institutional building and construct a new six-story-over-basement Religious Institutional building (dba San Bao Temple) within the RC-4 (Residential-Commercial, High-Density) Zoning District, an 80-D Height and Bulk District and the Van Ness Special Use District.

Recommendation

The Department recommends that the Commission *approve* the proposed Ordinance and adopt the attached Draft Resolution to that effect.

The Department recommends that the Commission *approve* the requests for Conditional Use Authorization with the attached Conditions of Approval.

Basis for Recommendation

The Department finds that the Project is, on balance, consistent with the Van Ness Avenue Area Plan and the Objectives and Policies of the General Plan. Although the Project does not result in any net new housing, it would significantly improve the appearance of the property, incorporating numerous attractively landscaped open areas, an entry garden, and the installation of a new street tree along Van Ness Avenue. The Department also finds the project to be necessary, desirable, and compatible with the surrounding neighborhood because it will allow for the retention and expansion of the American Buddhist Cultural Society's ("ABCS") San Bao Temple, which has occupied the site for nearly 20 years, and not to be detrimental to persons or adjacent properties in the vicinity.