

CITY OF CERES
PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES

November 7, 2011

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER: 6:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL:

PRESENT: Del Nero, Kachel, Kline, Molina, Smith

ABSENT: None

ALSO PRESENT: Deputy City Manager Sheila Cumberland, City Attorney Michael Lyons, Planning, Building & Housing Division Manager Tom Westbrook, Director/City Engineer Toby Wells, Redevelopment and Economic Development Manager Bryan Briggs, Associate Planner James Michaels, Secretary Ann Montgomery

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chairperson Kachel.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

None

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION:

None

CITIZEN COMMUNICATION:

None

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA AS POSTED (OR AMENDED) AND
CERTIFICATION OF POSTING:**

It was moved by Commissioner Kline seconded by Commissioner Molina, to approve the agenda as posted. Carried 5/0.

CONSENT CALENDAR:

None

PUBLIC HEARING(S):

None

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Architectural and Site Plan Approval (ASPA) 11-03; Proposal for a 7,171 square foot addition to an existing building at 2016 Central Avenue. Assyrian Club of Urhai, Inc., applicant.

Associate Planner, James Michaels presented the staff report.

Questions from Commissioners:

- Commissioner Kline inquired if the fire damage has been repaired yet.

Mr. Westbrook replied no, it has not.

- Commissioner Kline asked if they were going to do repair at the same time.

Mr. Westbrook responded yes.

- Commissioner Kline questioned with the addition, and the occupancy increased to 860, is there anything that says the requirement for restroom facilities.

Mr. Westbrook replied that the restroom facilities for the entire building will have to meet the California Building Code. They will have the minimum number of required restroom spaces that can accommodate the existing building plus the addition.

- Commissioner Smith clarified, that the City of Ceres does not have Design Guidelines.

Mr. Westbrook stated that is correct.

- Commissioner Smith further inquired, in the absence of Design Guidelines, staff uses what criteria to determine the acceptability of an elevation.

Mr. Westbrook responded what staff falls back to is the General Plan. It's the General Plan policies that regulate commercial development or residential or industrial development, and we see what aspects a project has in terms of compliance or adherence to those standards, i.e. parking, landscaping, façade improvements. Generally, when we

come to the Planning Commission, we'll talk about, this building meets those parameters, but the addition of stone, or the addition of elements to a rear facing side that looks towards a street, or something like that. Those are generally things that we give you in terms of meeting the compliance of those things. When you look at the building we have here today, there's articulation, there's materials, there's colors; generally, it falls within the parameters of what those General Plan Guidelines would suggest.

- Commissioner Smith questioned when you apply those General Guidelines, are you also looking at the compatibility of the design with the existing neighborhood.

Mr. Westbrook replied certainly we would try to look at that, as an aspect. It's difficult, particularly in this circumstance, where you have a neighborhood that's substantially developed, and has been there for decades. You have buildings that are not going to look like any façade improvement across the street, regardless if it's the castle-type theme, or something more contemporary. They're never going to look alike. What we try to do, is get something that will perhaps go with the neighborhood, and also meet the needs of the folks that are requesting the building addition.

- Commissioner Smith stated that Mr. Westbrook is correct; the neighborhood has been there for quite some time. She is sure that a façade improvement could be on all of those building agendas. But when you have a new building coming in, you have the potential for setting a standard, of what future design elevations may appear like.

Mr. Westbrook commented that he would certainly agree that this is more of a one-of-a-kind concept, with the castle elements and the stone. Something a little less contemporary would probably fit into something that those other retailers or property owners may do. As he stated in the beginning, this does kind of meet that envelope, because absent design guidelines, we fall back to the standards of the General Plan; that's why staff had lent its support for the project as proposed.

- Commissioner Smith remarked that there's a high school next door, not far up the street is an elementary school, and on both sides are residential areas.

Mr. Westbrook responded that to the east, certainly there is residential, to the west, Central Avenue, a little bit of retail facing Central, and then further to the west there is more residential.

- Commissioner Molina inquired about the picture of the building on the screen; is this only a sample of how this building would look like.

Mr. Michaels stated that is correct. It won't be exact, but has those kinds of features.

Mr. Westbrook added that staff doesn't have the ability sometimes to give you a perspective of what something looks like in 3D, and we knew that this example existed

on the other side of Central Avenue, to the west of 99, so we thought we'd include it for your consideration.

- Commissioner Molina asked if the landscaping on this project was going to be somewhat similar to what we have on the picture.

Mr. Westbrook replied that the landscaping at the existing building is largely going to remain the same.

- Commissioner Kline wanted to verify, that looking at the picture, there are square columns going up; the new one, looking at page 22, it looks like they're round columns, like a castle, and on page 23, it shows a little more with color detail.

Mr. Westbrook commented that perhaps some of those questions can be better answered by the applicant and their representative, who are in the audience. Perhaps they can provide a greater detail, in terms of the concept that they selected to propose to the Planning Commission.

The public hearing was opened at 6:10 p.m.

- Sabino Urrutia – 1625 Marazzi Lane, Ceres, CA

Mr. Urrutia stated that he is the designer with Onpoint Design Group. They have received approval and permit to get started on the repairs.

They would like to enlarge the banquet hall area, with the new addition. They haven't calculated the restroom stalls yet; they currently have three on each side and may need to add three more on each side (men/women).

- Commissioner Smith asked how and why you selected the castle appearance.

Mr. Urrutia responded that it is just the way the owners would like it to look; their preference.

- Commissioner Smith inquired, in choosing the castle design, you were or weren't trying to appeal to anyone in particular.

Mr. Urrutia replied no, it's a bingo hall and it's pretty much going to stay a bingo hall as well as a banquet hall. It serves everyone; it's not a place for sanctuaries, it's not a place for business, in that sense. It's going to be exactly the same way, where everyone comes in and meets, does their deal, banquets, parties. It'll be exactly the same use as it is now; it's pretty much an expansion of that.

- Commissioner Smith remarked that it's just occurring to her that it's not compatible even though everything is old and needs a facelift. But, she is concerned that it is so

different than what is currently in existence there, that it may detract from future improvement as opposed to enhanced future improvement. She questioned if Mr. Urrutia and the applicant feel this is compatible with the existing and potential future development in that area.

Mr. Urrutia responded that it's not going to be a real old rustic castle type appearance like in movies. It's going to have certain elements that new buildings have. There are things that can or can not be changed, as far as how we want it to look. It's something that the owners would love to be able to have. We're not going with crazy colors; we're going with beige and contemporary type colors. We're not going with flags and making it a medieval type thing. He believes the only differences are the towers and the façade on the top. Other than that, we're using stucco elements; it's all stamped. In his opinion, it should be nice.

- Commissioner Kline asked, with the existing building there, why didn't they play off the architectural design of the existing building, by expanding it. They have been a great "good neighbor," always taking care of graffiti, landscaping, etc. The existing building is compatible to the neighborhood, architecturally sound.

Mr. Urrutia replied that what is being presented is what the owner/applicant wishes to have. He's hoping with the colors and elements they've chosen, that it doesn't stand out too much.

The public hearing was closed at 6:18 p.m.

Commission Discussion

Commissioner Smith stated that she agrees with Commissioner Kline, that the existing business has been a "good neighbor," there haven't been any issues; she's happy to see that they've taken care of the fire and want to expand. She supports all of that, but she's concerned with the elevation and it's compatibility with the existing neighborhood and the future development of the neighborhood. She's concerned that this is not consistent with what we need it to be.

Commissioner Molina commented that there's another hall like this in Turlock and it also has a castle look to it. He feels this design is perhaps more of a personal appeal to their culture. On Central Avenue, he doesn't see where we're going to have room for a lot more building, and this will give the area a little bit of a facelift. He proceeded to ask staff if they looked at the design before it was brought to the Planning Commission, as far as the City Ordinance; there's nothing really holding it back from being able to design it that way.

Mr. Westbrook confirmed that statement is correct. He explained that when this project went through the Predevelopment process, the building was going to retain the existing building and structure as it looked, and then kind of a metal building next to it. Staff

informed Mr. Urrutia and the property owners that would not be acceptable; that they would need to do some type of facelift to the existing building and the new. What is proposed before you is the concept that they came up with. As he mentioned earlier, because the City doesn't have its own established design guidelines, we use the parameters of the General Plan. It would be his opinion that this would at least fall within those parameters of the General Plan, in terms of use of stone elements, the parking lot has already been established, and the landscaping has been there for many years. So there's not necessarily a recommendation from staff, to make additions or modifications to the elevations, because we feel that it does meet the conceptual guidelines within the General Plan.

Commissioner Molina inquired if the front of the existing building is going to be retouched with the same material, so it's uniform with the current building.

Mr. Westbrook stated yes, there will not be any distinguishable difference between the existing and new buildings, once they are constructed.

Commissioner Smith clarified that while staff is limited in terms of their ability to provide input, in the absence of design guidelines, the purpose for bringing architectural site plan review to the Planning Commission is to make those judgments, and to determine compatibility within a specific area. While we, the Planning Commission also have the absence of design guidelines, our charge is to look at the presentation of the elevation, and determine whether or not it's compatible. Staff has done their job to the best of their ability, given the tools that they have. Now it's left to us to say, okay, you've done what you could do, now we have to look at this and say, does this fit within the community as it currently exists, and as we project it to grow in the future.

Commissioner Kline remarked, when you say you're "absence of Design Guidelines;" you had a strip center on Mitchell Road, where In-Shape City and the bank are. Then across the street, with the Walgreens vacant lot and then the strip center; when that came before us, there were requirements as far as the tile work, and what they could do and how they wanted to do it. There was some set of guidelines because of the business corridor.

Mr. Westbrook stated that Commissioner Kline is exactly correct. The difference being is that Mitchell Road has an adopted Mitchell Road Corridor Specific Plan that has its own established set of guidelines for businesses and properties on Mitchell Road only. It doesn't apply anywhere else in the City.

Commissioner Kline stated that he supports this project. He thinks that it's a welcome addition. What he's really tugging with, is because of the 1940's neighborhood, he would like to see this scaled in a way to fit the existing, older neighborhood. He knows that there's one of these over on Central, over off Railroad, but that's over in the industrial area and older neighborhood. He's not saying anything negative about it. He just wishes we could do something architecturally to fit more into the existing mold of

the neighborhood. The strip center across the street and Sequoia Market aren't going to change. He does agree with Commissioner Smith, to scale down the façade or doing something architecturally to a degree that would be compatible.

Commissioner Molina motioned to approve the project as presented; Commissioner Del Nero seconded.

Comments on the motion:

Commissioner Del Nero stated that his only thoughts are, say before tonight, have we ever gone by there, have we ever thought about this building like we think of it tonight? Probably the only thing he'll say is, he hasn't. He stated that when we have a time to change it, the way we want to see the City change; he guesses it's a good thing and that's why we're up here.

Commissioner Kline commented that he's going to support the project with his reservations on the façade. He would really like the owners to try to work with staff to come up with a design that's more compatible with the neighborhood. He welcomes the addition. There's a lot of property there, and it's to good use.

Commissioner Kachel commented this is similar to a project that came before the Commission a couple of years ago, he believes on Whitmore, to convert a house into an office. Everything around it was residential, and everything around it was built at the same time. And at that time, they asked the applicant if he would be willing to make some adjustments from his commercial proposal to make it look more like the houses surrounding it. He came to the podium and said yes he would. To Chairperson Kachel, the difference between that project and this one is that everything looked the same in the area. If you were to drive up that stretch of Central Avenue, there doesn't seem to be a theme in the neighborhood. So, he doesn't have a problem with the proposal.

Commissioner Kachel stated we have a motion and a second on the floor; Carried 4/1 (Commissioner Smith, No).

PUBLIC MEETING(S):

None

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

None

MATTER INITIATED BY PLANNING COMMISSION AND STAFF

None

**ADJOURN AS THE PLANNING COMMISSION TO THE CERES DOWNTOWN
REVITALIZATION AREA BOARD**

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER: 6: 30 p.m.

ROLL CALL:

PRESENT: Del Nero, Kachel, Kline, Molina, Smith

ABSENT: None

ALSO PRESENT: Deputy City Manager Sheila Cumberland, City Attorney Michael Lyons, Planning, Building & Housing Division Manager Tom Westbrook, Director/City Engineer Toby Wells, Redevelopment and Economic Development Manager Bryan Briggs, Associate Planner James Michaels, Secretary Ann Montgomery

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

- Redevelopment and Economic Development Manager Bryan Briggs introduced Ben Siegel, newest member of the City of Ceres Redevelopment and Economic Development team. Ben is a graduate student in the Public Administration program at Stan State. We have taken him on as an intern in the Redevelopment and Economic Development department. He comes highly regarded by the Chair of the department. Mr. Briggs asked Ben to say a few words.

Mr. Siegel shared that when he had the opportunity to take up this internship, in this particular area, he was really excited because he was going to be part of a team that's going to do something locally. Since he's been working with Mr. Briggs, he's been able to help him with existing projects like the 4th Street Parking Lot and the Whitmore Retail Project, and see projects and see the internal processes, away from the textbooks on campus. He thanked the Commission for the opportunity to speak to them and looks forward to helping Mr. Briggs out in any way that he can, to help out Ceres.

Commissioner Kline asked Mr. Siegel if he was any relation to the Superintendent of Schools, Scott Siegel.

Mr. Siegel replied no.

Chairperson Kachel welcomed Mr. Siegel and stated that they are looking forward to perhaps seeing more of him.

2. FY 2011-2012 Quarterly (1st) Report for period ending September 30, 2011.

Redevelopment and Economic Development Manager, Bryan Briggs reported that as the Commission is probably aware, the California Legislature has attempted to “dis-involve” the Redevelopment Agencies in California. And, as a result there has not been a lot of activity in the Ceres Redevelopment Agency, pending the outcome of the California Supreme Court case, which will have its oral arguments on November 10th.

Mr. Briggs presented the staff report for the 1st Quarter Report for CDRAB.

Questions from Commissioners:

- Commissioner Smith inquired about the retail analysis that he’s conducting to develop the attraction strategy; she asked if he was also developing a retention strategy. It is her understanding that the majority of new jobs are developed from existing business. There is a huge market out there right now for new businesses. Every community is trying to figure out a way to get “the big fish,” and odds are not in our favor, given a number of different things. It’s not just us; we’re in the valley. One of the things she’d like to see us focus on is strengthening the existing businesses we have, helping them to expand, and develop jobs within the community, so they can prosper and of course, our sales tax can prosper. It’s her guess that with Raley’s leaving, that is going to make a hit to our sales tax revenue.

Mr. Briggs replied that unfortunately she’s probably right, as far as Raley’s goes, but we’re hoping that’s short term. He has spoken to the Raley’s Vice President of Finance and Development, and he has informed Mr. Briggs that there were three grocery markets that he had been speaking with, and they’ve narrowed that down to one. They are in the “letter of intent” stage; it’s a 90-day period that both sides conduct due-diligence on, for the quality of the building, the financial condition of the tenant. Both sides basically evaluate each other in that 90-day period, and if things look good and they are able to hammer out lease terms, they should have that conducted. It shouldn’t take any more than 120-days after the 90-day due diligent period.

Mr. Briggs continued with responding to Commissioner Smith’s question on business retention. Economic Developers know that the number one job source is the businesses that you already have. His informal economic development strategy is to visit the businesses that we have. He does go out into the community on a semi-regular basis to introduce himself, to find out about each particular business, takes notes and takes those back to the office, and compiles a data base. He also works in conjunction with the Alliance, who also does business retention. Lea Ann Hoogestraat is the business representative with the Alliance that is assigned to the Ceres marketplace; she and Mr. Briggs converse on a regular basis. She also goes out into the community and introduces

herself, and compiles information. We use a data base called “Execu-pulse.” As far as having a more cohesive and organized strategy, that will be included in the proposal that Urban Futures has presented to us. It will be expanding on something that he is already doing.

- Commissioner Kline asked what the Ceres Trial Balance Report is, does it just carry over from the previous year.

Mr. Briggs explained that it’s a program that we run to obtain financial information. He believes we use Eden for our financial transaction reports, and the trial balance is just an accounting of that particular fund.

- Commissioner Kline verified with Mr. Briggs that it includes a carry over from the previous year.
- Commissioner Kline asked if part of the redevelopment project was helping construct the 4th Street parking lot.

Mr. Briggs confirmed that was correct.

- Commissioner Kline further inquired if they did the curbs and gutters.

Mr. Briggs responded no, that was Community Development Block Grant. He further explained that Redevelopment Agency funds paid for the construction of the 4th Street parking lot.

- Commissioner Kline asked if that was part of his 2011-2012 budget.

Mr. Briggs answered no, not of the CDRAB budget, but it is part of the Redevelopment Agency budget.

- Commissioner Kline inquired about the expenditures being projected at \$39,863, but revenue is only \$17,250; are we going to use some of the \$90,015.15 reserve, with no ways of getting the reserve back up.

Mr. Briggs explained that presumably the activities of the Redevelopment Agency will raise the profile of the downtown as part of our revitalization efforts. When and if that occurs, the revenue that is able to be generated from the downtown district should increase. In the interim, CDRAB staff has an obligation to try to enhance the downtown in any way that we can. In this particular case, we’re requesting that enhancement be done in the marketing effort. That’s the reason why the “contract services” line item budget is much higher than it has been the last few years.

- Chairperson Kachel inquired about a previous statement that was made by someone on the development team, that it was their understanding that SaveMart intended to

expand; has Mr. Briggs received any updates on that.

Mr. Briggs responded that he has not spoken with SaveMart, but he has spoken with a commercial real estate broker who knows the owner of SaveMart, and said that their expansion plans are currently on hold.

Commissioner Smith motioned to accept the FY 2011-2012 Quarterly (1st) Report for period ending September 30, 2011; Commissioner Molina seconded; Carried 5/0.

RECONVENED AS THE PLANNING COMMISSION at 6:44 P.M.

REPORTS:

Staff – Mr. Westbrook reported that on October 12, 2011 there was a lawsuit filed against the City of Ceres by the Citizens for Ceres, so the Mitchell Ranch/Walmart project will go into the next phase. Unlike the entitlement process, where he can forecast when things may happen; he does not know when things will happen here. The City Attorney, Sheila Cumberland and Tom Westbrook will be working to protect the City's interest in that lawsuit. He has no idea when there may be resolution. Until that time, nothing can develop on that property.

ADJOURNMENT:

The Commission adjourned at 6:45 p.m. to the next regularly scheduled meeting of Monday, December 5, 2011.

APPROVED:


Bob Kachel, Chairperson

ATTEST:


Tom Westbrook, Secretary