

**MINUTES APPROVED AT THE DRB MEETING ON DECEMBER 11, 2024**

**DESIGN REVIEW BOARD REGULAR MEETING**  
**Multi-Purpose Room, Community Services Building, Basement Level**  
**440 Civic Center Plaza, Richmond CA 94804**  
September 11, 2024  
6:00 P.M.

**BOARD MEMBERS**

Bahar Biazar	Kimberly Butt
Ben Kellman	Karlyn Neel
Vita Rey	Brian Carter, Chair

Chair Brian Carter called the regular meeting to order at 6:01 P.M.

**ROLL CALL**

**Present:** Chair Brian Carter, and Boardmembers Bahar Biazar, Ben Kellman, and Vita Rey

**Absent:** Boardmembers Kimberly Butt and Karlyn Neel

**INTRODUCTIONS**

**Staff Present:** Planners Hector Lopez, Emily Sanchez-Resendiz (Contract Planner), Dana Ayers, and Christopher Dykzeul from the City Attorney's Office

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** August 14, 2024

Given that there was not a quorum of members present at the August 14, 2024 meeting to approve the minutes at this time, they were continued to the next meeting for approval.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA:** None

**MEETING PROCEDURES:** None

**PUBLIC FORUM**

No written comments were submitted, or oral comments made, by any member of the public.

**CITY COUNCIL LIAISON REPORT:** None

**CONSENT CALENDAR:** None

**APPEAL DATE**

The appeal date for actions taken by the Board at this meeting will be no later than 5:00 P.M. on Monday, September 23, 2024.

**PUBLIC HEARING**

- |                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| <b>1. PLN23-316</b> | <b>YES, NATURE TO NEIGHBORHOODS OFFICE PROJECT</b> |
| Description         | REQUEST FOR A PUBLIC HEARING TO CONSIDER A DESIGN  |

**MINUTES APPROVED AT THE DRB MEETING ON DECEMBER 11, 2024**

REVIEW PERMIT, A WAIVER, EXCEPTIONS TO ARCHITECTURAL STANDARDS, A SIGN PERMIT, AND SIGN VARIANCES TO DEMOLISH AN EXISTING 2,218-SQUARE-FOOT ONE-STORY STRUCTURE AND CONSTRUCT A NEW 4,500-SQUARE-FOOT TWO-STORY OFFICE BUILDING AND 345-SQUARE-FOOT GARAGE ADDITION ON A DEVELOPED 7,500-SQUARE-FOOT PARCEL.

Location	3029 MACDONALD AVENUE	
APN	516-172-019	
Zoning	T5 MAIN STREET OPEN (T5MS-O)	
Owner	YES, NATURE TO NEIGHBORHOODS	
Applicant	MAURICE LEVITCH	
Staff Contact	EMILY SANCHEZ-RESENDIZ	Recommendation: CONDITIONAL APPROVAL

Emily Sanchez-Resendiz presented the staff report dated September 11, 2024, for a public hearing to consider conditional approval of a project for a Design Review Permit as well as a waiver, exceptions to Architectural Standards from the Richmond Form-Based Code (FBC) , a sign permit and related sign variances. The DRB had previously considered the project in study session on April 10, 2024, and no substantial comments had been made at that time. The DRB generally supported the design, and some compliance issues had either been resolved or the applicant was asking for deviations to requirements. The current buildings had been constructed in 1940 and required a Historic Resource Evaluation prior to proceeding with demolition. The evaluation had found that the structure was not eligible for individual listing on any historical register, and a copy of the evaluation had been provided in the DRB packet.

The applicant requested design review to demolish the existing office building and construct a new office building and an addition to the existing garage. The project was subject to the City's FBC and the applicant expressed deviations from the standards of the FBC including one waiver, two sign variances, and 14 architectural exceptions, which she delineated at this time.

Ms. Sanchez-Resendiz described the buildings on the subject 7,500 square foot parcel at the corner of the intersection of MacDonald Avenue and 31st Street, pointed out those buildings to be demolished and replaced, and noted that the existing wooden fence at the rear and interior side lot would be replaced. The existing primary building was currently occupied by the owner and was the site of YES, Nature to Neighborhoods activities. The redevelopment would expand the existing facility to accommodate larger groups and activities, the land use designation would remain as General Office with Community Assembly as an accessory use, and the redevelopment would include construction of a new two-story 4,500-square-foot primary office building and 345-square-foot addition to the garage structure, along with frontage improvements such as the replacement of existing planters along the east and south faces of the building and an 894-square-foot interior courtyard with additional landscaping on the interior.

Ms. Sanchez-Resendiz explained that the site was within the North & East Neighborhood Council and was surrounded by commercial, residential and open space uses, with Nicholl Park directly across the street. The property was zoned T5 Main Street Open (T5MS-O) in a Transect Zone and she described the standards and supplemental development standards involved. The project complied with most of the applicable standards for the zoning designation. There was one non-compliance within that zone that required a waiver in the architectural standards, which had been identified in the staff report, and a refuse enclosure would have to be constructed.

With respect to height, Ms. Sanchez-Resendiz stated the application was compliant with the 35-

## **MINUTES APPROVED AT THE DRB MEETING ON DECEMBER 11, 2024**

foot overall allowable height.

The standards for ceiling height in the district allowed a 10-foot residential and 12-foot service and retail uses height. Since there was no standard for office uses, staff had imposed a 10-foot height requirement for the project, which had proposed 9-foot-high ceilings within the office spaces on both floors. The applicant requested a waiver to allow the proposed 9-foot ceiling height from the 10-foot ceiling height requirement.

Ms. Sanchez-Resendiz identified a wall extension on the east side of the building to provide access to the existing garage from a 19-foot driveway that would be utilized to partially satisfy the City's one percent per art requirement. She pointed out other areas of compliance with the FBC and described the proposed design of the building as a contemporary style under the FBC intended to have a streamlined aesthetic with minimal ornamentation and focus on material and color. The proposed building would have a flat roof and clay colored stucco exterior on the ground floor and wood siding on the majority of the exterior of the second floor and for the rest of the building. There would be steel frame awnings and wood above all windows of the façade and the proposed roll up shutter gate would provide transparency on the 31<sup>st</sup> Street façade.

Ms. Sanchez-Resendiz described the design features allowed under the architectural styles section of the FBC and reported that the applicant was compliant with all but five standards under that section and requested 14 exceptions to those standards, primarily having to do with windows. She described the deviations requested and explained that those exceptions had been included in Exhibits C and D to the staff report.

Ms. Sanchez-Resendiz also presented the sign program and the sign variances requested along with the site improvements, which included 864 square feet of new landscaping and a new 894 square-foot courtyard to be used as open space. In addition, the replacement of existing planters would represent a total of 134 square feet of the new landscaping, with low to moderate water use planting. The proposed landscaping would satisfy the minimum landscaping coverage. In addition, one on-site tree and two street trees had been proposed. Staff recommended a condition that one street tree be planted on the 31<sup>st</sup> Street frontage while four additional trees be planted on site, or as an alternative, that compliance be achieved through the planting of off-site trees at twice the ratio, location subject to the approval of the Zoning Administrator.

Ms. Sanchez-Resendiz described the project lighting as 15 light fixtures on all sides of the exterior of the building, with small shielded down-lights to be attached to the building, with a condition for a lighting photometric plan to ensure that the fixtures did not exceed a certain lumen output.

Ms. Sanchez-Resendiz stated the owner had conducted public outreach within 300 feet of the project site and no comments had been received to date. Conditions of approval had been recommended related to landscaping, lighting and refuse, and she highlighted some of the other recommended conditions of approval and required findings related to the requested waiver, exceptions and variances that would be met. She recommended conditional approval of the application for a design review permit, a sign permit and two related sign variances, 14 architectural exceptions and one waiver for a reduction in ceiling height.

Chair Carter opened the public hearing.

ERIC AAHOLM, YES, Nature to Neighborhoods, offered some background to the 25-year-old non-profit organization that had served the City of Richmond the entire time, offering as its

## **MINUTES APPROVED AT THE DRB MEETING ON DECEMBER 11, 2024**

primary activities outdoor access and leadership development serving between 500-600 youth and family members each year.

Mr. Aaholm reported that the outdoor access and leadership development services were offered through a variety of activities on-site and at nearby nature areas, utilizing Nicholl Park and other nearby parks in Richmond, regional parks and other areas such as Point Reyes, Yosemite and the Sierras. He noted that families had grown up in the programs offered by YES for youth leadership and adult leadership pathways. On average, participants spent about seven years in the programs drawing primarily from lower-income Black and Brown families in the community of Richmond. He explained that 98 percent of young YES's people were graduating from high school and 85 percent were going on to college, and YES's 20 hired employees came from the local community. He added that YES had become an anchor organization in the City of Richmond, particularly over the last 6-7 years.

The organization had done quite a bit of beautification, enhancements and improvements to Nicholl Park and Mr. Aaholm spoke to planned future improvements. He characterized the project as a permanent home for YES and one for the community for generations to come. He added that the building would allow YES's programming to double in size.

The unidentified designer described one of the core goals to find ways to blend YES's core values of connection of belonging into the physical design where YES participants, youth and adults, had been brought together to share their visions of the ideal of a YES base camp. The main takeaway was that everyone was looking for a sanctuary-like space where meaningful connections could be made, which had been broken down into a physical reality by creating a space filled with light, air, and access to nature through a number of features such as the double-height atrium space (lobby) that created a strong sense of safety, large multi-fold doors to the multi-purpose room and the kitchen, a safe courtyard surrounded by buildings on all four sides, with solid fences taller than standard to protect the privacy of participants through a sense of solace, reflection and wellness as well as fun, and the strategic placement of windows to frame specific elements of the courtyard and Nicholl Park.

It was pointed out that there would be public art on both sides of the building.

Boardmember Kellman recommended that the proposed mural be installed on the MacDonald elevation. He liked the project and supported the organization and the proposed design. He was also comfortable with the staff recommendations for the exceptions. He commented however, that the design struck him as very un-Richmond and he suggested that the building be stuccoed since nothing in Richmond looked like what had been proposed. While the proposal was attractive, he suggested it was odd and he would love to see the building be plastered with some natural wood to encase the windows.

Boardmember Biazar congratulated the applicant for the beautiful design that integrated everything inside to create a safe and fun place. With respect to the façade, she agreed the façade was not typical for the region, and based on the rendering stated the wood felt heavy. With respect to the orange wall to match the orange in the logo, she suggested the entire color palette of the façade could be more neutral and not so heavy. She recommended that different variations of the orange be considered, especially if the wall was to be a backdrop for different murals. She characterized the rest of the design as beautiful.

MAURICE LEVITCH, Levitch Associates, Inc., Berkeley, responded to the comments with respect to design project and noted they had actually done a sample on another building as a mock-up for the subject project, using the Thermory treated wood called Monte Verde. He stated it was a

## MINUTES APPROVED AT THE DRB MEETING ON DECEMBER 11, 2024

rain screen system that did not require blocking in that the rain screen would help preserve the wood, which could weather to gray over time. Other materials had also been considered but there was a strong sentiment for wood given the desire to focus on nature and natural materials. He suggested a fully stuccoed building would not offer the same feel.

Mr. Levitch stated the color could be reconsidered and he emphasized the desire to address maintenance issues, and explained there was no desire to use artificial materials. He added that the project had originally started out as a remodel and there was a desire to honor the corner of the property and rounding the corner was a nice way to do that. It was also noted that a more neutral tan, grounded tone was intended as opposed to the orange image in the rendering.

Boardmember Rey commented that there was a lot of stucco in Richmond, and if the building were to gray out it might seem a bit heavier. She asked if a lighter color had been considered.

The designer noted that a cedar treatment had been considered, and a salvaged redwood could be considered. He added that more research could also be done.

Boardmember Rey stated it was important that the tone of the stucco be in relation to the tone of the wood. She suggested a lighter wood might be more successful.

Chair Carter suggested the use of materials and colors was emblematic of the building typology to be a place for young children and adults facilitating experiences in nature, and he suggested the use of materials was quite appropriate and the ground floor stucco was wise given that it had more of a commercial feel and would be easier to contend with if tagged. As far as the specific colors, he liked the variation that had been illustrated in the wood.

Mr. Levitch commented that the wood would be treated naturally, not using different kinds of wood and not going with a solid body stain but using a transparent stain to let the natural frame come through. He stated that choosing a vibrant color would make the building a fun place to be for kids, and while he appreciated the desire to respect a certain Richmond aesthetic, he suggested the proposal had enough of both worlds of the traditional and light and space as articulated. He suggested it would fit.

Boardmember Kellman verified with the applicant that the sunshades were powdered coated steel and wood slats.

Mr. Aaholm referred to the new emergency resilience shelter and bathrooms that YES had done at Nicholl Park and recommended doing the entire bottom of the building at MacDonald and 31<sup>st</sup> Street with the mural in a similar vein, and while not a done deal because it would require approval from the Richmond Arts and Culture Commission, it could integrate the YES space with the new space across the street.

The DRB supported that option, and the designer commented that would help justify the use of wood more while still looking at other tones, and Boardmembers agreed with the extension of art, and that blending the orange wall with art all over would be successful and inviting to children, with caution for maintenance cycles for painting to avoid the need to redo the mural. It was also suggested that the murals would make it more Richmond-ish.

Chair Carter closed the public hearing.

**ACTION: It was M/S/C (Carter/Rey) to approve PLN23-316, YES, Nature to Neighborhoods Office Project, subject to the 56 Findings and Statements of Fact with**

## **MINUTES APPROVED AT THE DRB MEETING ON DECEMBER 11, 2024**

the staff recommended 15 Conditions of Approval, along with the DRB recommended condition as follows: 16) The ground floor mural be cohesively integrated with the building as it wrapped the corner along both street frontages on the stucco portion; approved by a Roll Call vote: 4-0 (Ayes: Biazar, Kellman, Rey and Carter; Noes: None; Abstain: None; Absent: Butt and Neel.)

When asked, Mr. Levitch advised that the project was expected to start in about nine months.

### **Board Business**

#### **A. Nomination of Board Chair and Vice Chair**

Christopher Dykzeul from the City Attorney's Office clarified that a DRB Chair could serve for one year, with no more than two consecutive one-year terms.

Given that the full DRB was currently not available, it was recommended that the nominations for Board Chair and Vice Chair be continued to the next meeting, scheduled for September 25, 2024, with Boardmembers urged to attend that meeting with nominations in mind.

Mr. Dykzeul clarified that with the current six members on the DRB, four members would constitute a quorum.

#### **B. Staff reports, requests, or announcements: None**

#### **C. Board Member Reports, Requests, or Announcements**

Hector Lopez reported that Principal Planner Hector Rojas had resigned and a new Principal Planner had been hired.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:21 P.M. to the regular Design Review Board meeting on Wednesday, September 25, 2024.