



2800 28<sup>th</sup> Street, Ste 171  
Santa Monica, CA 90405  
T: +1 310 396 4540

## La Veranda Summary Notes from DRAC meeting 4/05/16

The Design Review Advisory Committee (DRAC) met to review the La Veranda affordable housing project by Abode Communities located on E. Cesar Chavez between Matthews and Soto.

Vivian Rescalvo of Metro made an introduction and Gwynne Pugh Urban Studio provided an overview of the design review checklist to assist the DRAC in its reviewing task as well as a review of the project for the consideration by DRAC.

Abode presented the project.

The Community was given the opportunity to provide comments:

- Desire for 1 bedroom units (Up to 2 people)
- Want smaller retail spaces so they are more affordable
- Interaction of vendors with the building management (they don't want to be scooted away if they're in front of the building)

The DRAC then deliberated on the proposal which consisted of questions to the developer, staff and consultants

- Street Vendor space: Property management and tenants should have relationship with street vendors
- Would like side by side comparison of # units/Average Mean Income Levels (AMI) from proposal to current
- Coordinate with Great Streets (Mayor Garcetti's program)
- Concerns about the Design being too boxy
- Balcony facing Cesar Chavez and Matthews looks awkward
- Like setbacks
- Don't like pop out at white building facing Mathews (varying comments by Committee)
- Don't like balconies that stick out-integrate into façade
- Review balconies and some of the façade treatment
- Activate alley
- Access to property via alley/Soto

- Improvement of alley for pedestrian use (access would then have to be on Soto for the 27 units)
- Trees and shade
- More shading at perimeters and alley
- Lighting at streets and alley
- Consider pedestrian flow
- Consider flow of traffic / use of alley
- Close off alley at Cesar Chavez – all traffic through Mathews alley entrance
- Pedestrian safety enhancements

There was an extended conversation about vehicle access on Soto to the smaller housing complex. Abode related a conversation with DOT regarding the access on Soto for vehicular traffic. However, the alley is significantly substandard at its southern end and would pose practical difficulties. Further study is required to assess whether a right traffic turn into the driveway and a right turn out onto Soto (right in, right out) might not be a better alternative than a substandard alley, especially given security concerns.

The Consultant's review of this project is attached and should be addressed, along with this summary.

## **Gwynne Pugh's Review of La Veranda Project**

**5 April, 2016**

Re: La Veranda, Cesar Chavez & Soto; Abode Communities

To: the Design Review Advisory Committee (DRAC),

At the request of Metro we are assisting the DRAC in the process of review of La Veranda located between Soto Street and Matthews Street on E. Cesar Chavez Avenue. The project consists of seventy-seven (77) units of two and three bedroom units with eight thousand square feet (8,000 sq ft.) of commercial space and ninety-five parking stalls. The ground floor consists primarily of public and resident community spaces as well as the parking and up to three floors of residential units above. Residential common space includes a conference space, a community room, two laundries, a media room, a resident services office and property management offices.

It should be noted that the set of plans reviewed by us were 'conceptual'. Unit plans were not provided. These plans provide an early look and thus input may more easily be integrated now rather than at a later time when design has been firmed up and changes have greater consequences. Some of the comments are more in the nature of a question. The intention of this review is to bring to the attention of the DRAC certain elements for their consideration and to stimulate conversation. It is anticipated that there may be other comments and considerations the DRAC will make.

### **Urban Design**

In general the Urban Design aspects of this project are well thought out. One element missing at this stage is a survey which can affect how the project meets the ground and may affect heights and/or require some stepping.

The retail along Cesar Chavez is well located. There is specificity as to use, upon which the DRAC may wish to comment. The public parking is appropriate in quantity and well placed. The floor to floor height is unknown on the ground floor but should be around 15 feet or more. It might be advisable to secure the parking for 'after hours' with a gate. Residential parking is secured separately off the public parking.

Some residential units are provided towards the south of the project on Matthews and are street accessible. This is a pedestrian friendly move and enlivens the street.

At this time the design and nature of the building edge along the alley is unknown but is presumed to be secured, whether by fence or wall. Landscaping is shown but is probably inappropriate for an alley.

There is concern with the burying of the trash room in the Soto parcel and its accessibility for trash trucks off the alley. In addition, the pedestrian bridge on the second floor needs to be high enough for trash trucks to pass under.

The Soto street entrance and lobby seem limited. Information is not available. Should the parking area be controlled by a gate? In general the concept of where the mass and height should be is appropriate, being three stories on Cesar Chavez, four stories on Soto & Matthews and stepping down to two stories at the south end of the Matthews lot. The Soto lot has shifted the housing north away from the housing to the south but is right next to the King Taco lot. By creating the edges of the parcels for the majority of the structure the project has opened a generous area of community open space on the second floor of the Matthews lot.

The DRAC should review and consider the massing and scale.

### **Open and Public Space**

Generally the project sits comfortably in the neighborhood and places appropriate activity in the right location, making it pedestrian friendly. Apart from the retail/commercial use there has been little or no community connectivity or use.

The primary entrances to the residential units on the second floor are decidedly underwhelming and need greater emphasis.

The parking screening is unknown and the parking security needs to be further described.

As no landscaping has been provided, the level of tree shading and the type of trees are unknown, as is the landscaping in general. The amount of private open space is unknown and is highly desirable. The tenant open space needs to be described and developed and should include shade areas such as trellis canopies and potential family barbecue areas as well as a children's playground. The laundry should be oriented towards this last element.

The amenities for the residents as described in the introduction are good. Further development, details and description are needed.

### **Architecture and Buildings**

The aesthetics of the project are more suggested than they are determined. In general the design is contemporary with a number of separated masses with overlapping building elements.

The articulation is both busy and unduly flat. Some parts are busy some parts are very plain. In particular the residential elements along Matthews and Soto as well as internally are quite simple. This is not necessarily a bad thing but does need to be seen

in context and with the other elements together, which is currently unavailable. The scale seems appropriate, but needs the context of the neighborhood.

The residential element above the retail on Cesar Chavez is unduly busy and chopped up and needs a more rational composition. The DRAC determine if the 'hood' of the upper floor should be continuous or broken up or otherwise simplified. The DRAC may want to comment on the railing element and how the storefront looks.

In general the openness of the project seems appropriate.

The materiality – how it's made and of what – is not clear and needs further description.

In general the aesthetics and design description is limited but implied. This provides the DRAC with an opportunity to provide comment for Abode to consider when refining and completing the design.

### **Conclusion**

This project has a clear concept and addressed its place in the community. As it is early in the design process it allows consideration of comments as the design is refined. The general aesthetic is joyful and bright and with further refinement would be an asset o the community.