



July 24, 2016

(By Electronic Transmission)  
City of Alameda  
Planning Board  
2263 Santa Clara Avenue  
Alameda, CA. 94501

**Subject: PLN15-0198 Proposed project at 1926 Park Street (Item 7-C on Planning Board's 7-25-16 agenda)**

Dear Boardmembers,

The latest submittal is a major improvement over the previous "container" proposal. The Alameda Architectural Preservation Society (AAPS) would like to thank the project sponsors for making these changes. Based on these changes, AAPS no longer opposes the project.

However, it is still inconsistent with the North Park Street Gateway Subdistrict's discouragement of modern architecture as set forth in the August 2012 North Park Street Design Review Manual. On the other hand, most buildings along Blanding Avenue and the waterfront represent varying degrees of modern architecture. **We therefore recommend that the North Park Street Design Review Manual be revised so that the portion of the Gateway Subdistrict with frontage on Blanding be reclassified to the Waterfront Subdistrict which allows modern architecture.** Alternatively, the Manual could be amended so that the Blanding parcels would be exempted from the Gateway Subdistrict's restriction on modern architecture.

Staff continues to cite the Citywide Design Review Manual dated December, 2013 as the applicable design review criteria. But the Citywide Manual made significant changes to preceding design review documents (including to the North Park Street Design Review Manual's restriction on modern architecture in the Gateway Subdistrict) without review by the Planning Board, City Council or the public. **The Citywide Manual is therefore ineffective until it is formally reviewed by the Planning Board and approved by the City Council.**

Staff has advised us that they intend to take the Citywide Manual to the Planning Board and City Council for ratification, but this has not yet occurred. Until this is done, the August 2012 North Park Street Manual should be considered the applicable design review document for North Park Street.

Attached are our 11-27-15 and 12-1-15 letters to the City Council to provide you additional background.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please contact me at (510)523-0411 or [cbuckleyaicp@att.net](mailto:cbuckleyaicp@att.net) if you would like to discuss these comments.

Sincerely,

Christopher Buckley, President  
Alameda Architectural Preservation Society

Attachments: AAPS November 27, 2015 and December 1, 2015 letters

By Electronic Transmission:

cc: Mayor and City Council

Debbie Potter, Andrew Thomas, Allen Tai and David Sablan, Alameda Community Development  
Department

Marcel Sengul, Park Esquina, LLC

Downtown Alameda Business Association

AAPS Board and Preservation Action Committee



December 1, 2015

(By electronic transmission)  
Mayor and Councilmembers  
City of Alameda  
2263 Santa Clara Avenue  
Alameda, CA 94501

**Subject: Park Esquina Project, 1926 Park Street (Item 6-C on City Council's 12-1-15 agenda) - - Request for Continuance**

Dear Mayor Spencer and Councilmembers:

As noted in recent emails from City staff, the North Park Street Design Review Manual dated August, 2012 (and adopted by the City Council on April 2, 2013) that had been erroneously posted on the City's website until the end of last week is no longer part of the City's design review documents. Staff has advised that the "Citywide Design Review Manual", posted as a three-part document on the City's website, is now the City's only set of design review criteria (plus those in the Zoning Ordinance) applicable to the subject project. (Note: we had previously understood that the North Park Street Design Review Manual was an additional chapter within the Citywide Manual. The Guide to Residential Design, Guide to Ranch-Style and Webster Street Design Manual are also effectively additional chapters, but this is not obvious in the website listing.)

The Alameda Architectural Preservation Society (AAPS) which had been relying on the August, 2012 North Park Street Design Review Manual for its evaluation of the subject project now needs to perform a new evaluation, this time using the three-part Citywide Manual. AAPS does not have time to do this and submit well-prepared comments to the City Council in the few hours now available prior to tonight's City Council meeting.

**We therefore request that the City Council continue its consideration of this project to a future meeting.**

Please contact me at (510)523-0411 or [cbuckleyaicp@att.net](mailto:cbuckleyaicp@att.net) if you would like to discuss this request.

Sincerely,

Christopher Buckley, President  
Alameda Architectural Preservation Society

**By electronic transmission:**

cc: City Manager

Debbie Potter, Andrew Thomas and David Sablan, Community Development Department  
Marcel Sengul, Park Esquina, LLC  
Downtown Alameda Business Association  
AAPS Board and Preservation Action Committee



November 27, 2015

(By electronic transmission)  
Mayor and Councilmembers  
City of Alameda  
2263 Santa Clara Avenue  
Alameda, CA 94501

**Subject: Park Esquina, 1926 Park Street (Item 6-C on City Council's 12-1-15 agenda)**

Dear Mayor Spencer and Councilmembers:

The Alameda Architectural Preservation Society (AAPS) would like to thank the City Council for reconsidering the Planning Board's approval of the subject project. We would also like to thank the developer, Park Esquina, LLC, for their efforts to achieve a creative design.

Development on this site would be a potential catalyst project and a great opportunity for Alameda that should not be missed. Sensitive design consistent with the traditional architectural styles permitted in the Gateway Subdistrict as set forth in the Design Review Manual, perhaps emphasizing brick façades similar to the recent developments along Park Street north of Lincoln Avenue, would encourage further compatible commercial development in this area.

However, the project needs to be modified because it is inconsistent with the North Park Street Design Review Manual and North Park Street provisions of the Zoning Ordinance. **Allowing exceptions to these critical policy documents, that were the product of five years of work involving numerous meetings and extensive public input, sets a bad precedent and opens the door to similar exceptions both in the North Park Street District and citywide.** There are many other areas in Alameda where the proposed design would be appropriate, such as North Park Street's Workplace and Maritime Subdistricts as well as much of the northern waterfront.

Specifically, AAPS has the following concerns:

**1. Approving this project, as submitted, would essentially remove the Design Review Manual as a meaningful control.** The project would be the *de facto* gateway to Alameda as one enters from the Park Street Bridge. Beginning in 2008 The City of Alameda developed a strategic plan for the North Park Street District and its gateway. This plan cost an estimated \$100,000 and also involved many volunteer hours by Alamedans. The Strategic Plan was then used as a framework for developing the detailed *Design Review Manual*, *The North Park Street Districts* and related Zoning Ordinance amendments, both adopted by the City Council in 2013. These are the controlling documents for all development in the North Park Street District, especially for such a critical site.

**2. The building's proposed Modern architectural style is inconsistent with the traditional architectural styles called for in the Design Review Manual at this location.** The Design Review Manual sets forth nine architectural styles that can be used for the five subdistricts within the North Park

Street District. These nine styles are: Victorian, Colonial Revival, Neoclassical, Early 20th Century Commercial, Craftsman, Mediterranean, Art Deco, Streamline Moderne and Modern. The proposed building's architectural style is clearly "Modern", which according to the Manual is to be used only in the Waterfront and Workplace Commercial Subdistricts (see page 82 of the Manual). However the project site is in the Gateway Subdistrict.

**3. The project's proposed ca. 5 foot front setback along Park Street is inconsistent with the Zoning Ordinance provisions for the Gateway Subdistrict,** which requires a "0 max." front setback to provide a continuous street wall along the sidewalk. See Section 30-4.25d of the Zoning Ordinance.

The proposed front setback, therefore appears to require a zoning variance. Why was this Variance not included in the Planning Board and City Council approval packages? The standards for Variance approval are set forth in Section 30-21.1b of the Zoning Ordinance and are very restrictive:

1. There are exceptional or extraordinary circumstances applying to the property involved or to the proposed use of the property;
2. Because of such exceptional or extraordinary circumstances, the literal enforcement of specified provisions of this section would result in practical difficulty or unnecessary hardship such as to deprive the applicant of a substantial property right possessed by other owners of property in the same class of district; and
3. The granting of the variance will not, under the circumstances of the particular case, be detrimental to the public welfare or injurious to persons or property in the vicinity.

The waiver of the zero front setback does not conform to these standards.

The proposed front setback is also inconsistent with Alameda General Plan Policies 3.3.f and 3.3.h set forth in the City Design Element, calling for structures to be built to the front property line on Park Street.

4. The design uses stacked used ocean shipping containers which in no way are “visually compatible with the surrounding development” and its design elements are not “compatible with the character ... of adjacent development”. (*Design Review Manual, Section 1.2.3*)

5. The Design Review approval required applying the rules for exceptions. Exceptions are allowed on narrow grounds (*Design Review Manual, Section 1.2.1*):

- The ...project is consistent with the applicable General Plan policies and Zoning District Standards;
- The applicant demonstrates that a clearly superior design solution would result if the exception were granted and the new solution is supportive of the intent of the applicable Zoning District; and
- The proposed project is consistent with the Manual’s Guiding Principles.

The project does not meet these criteria.

6. Related to the concerns discussed in Items 2-5 above, the proposal is inconsistent with the following provisions of the Design Review Manual (emphasis added for key wording):

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### 1.1.4 Guiding Principles

The City of Alameda and its residents take great pride in the architectural quality of Alameda’s established neighborhoods and districts. **As new investment creates new buildings and renovates existing structures, the City wishes to maintain its continuity with its historic**

**identity.** Alameda's historic identity is partially defined and reinforced by buildings that share unique and complementary qualities of craft and character. **A key objective of the Design Review Manual is to preserve and enhance characteristics pertaining to site development and building design that define the character of Alameda neighborhoods and districts. The Design Review process attempts to balance a project sponsor's development objectives and/or creative desires with the community's desire to preserve and enhance its architectural quality and historic identity.** To this end, the following guiding principles form the basis for the Design Manual's more detailed provisions which follow, and are provided to guide design professionals, property owners, and the Design Review decision makers throughout the design review process.

Guiding Principle 1 - Neighborhood Context

*The range of appropriate architectural styles is established by neighborhood context.*

Guiding Principle 2 - Historic Context

*Valued historic character shall be maintained through the preservation and restoration of original building details and architectural style.*

Guiding Principle 3 - Building Context

*Renovations, and additions shall embrace and extend the design of the original building.*

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1.2 How to Use the Design Manual.

1.2.1 Overview. Pursuant to AMC Section 30-37, actions to approve a design review application must include the following three findings:

1. The proposed design **is consistent** with the General Plan, **Zoning Ordinance, and the City of Alameda Design Review Manual.**
2. The proposed design is appropriate for the site, **is compatible with adjacent or neighboring buildings or surroundings**, and promotes harmonious transitions in scale and character in areas between different designated land uses.
3. The proposed design of the structure and exterior materials and landscaping are **visually compatible with the surrounding development**, and design elements have been incorporated to ensure the **compatibility of the structure with the character and uses of adjacent development.**

**Exceptions: An exception to any provision within this Manual may be approved only where the City Staff, Planning Board or City Council upon appeal makes the following findings:**

1. The proposed project is consistent with the applicable General Plan policies and Zoning District standards.
2. The applicant demonstrates that a clearly superior design solution would result if the exception were granted, and the new solution is supportive of the intent of the applicable Zoning District.
3. The proposed project is consistent with the Manual's Guiding Principles.

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#### 4.1 Overview

##### 4.1.1 Introduction

The City of Alameda has an extraordinary stock of well preserved historic buildings. Walking through the City is like traveling back in time to an era when many traditional architectural styles flourished. **The preservation of existing structures and the construction of new buildings that respect and draw from past examples are crucial to maintaining the City's unique character.**

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#### 4.3 Architectural Style Guidelines

4.3.1 Overview. . . . **New construction is strongly encouraged to reflect qualities of scale and refinement common to historic styles.** Creativity is encouraged, **however, efforts should be made to build on the character of the City's architectural heritage.** Each applicant shall identify the architecture style of the proposed building.

7. The design incorporates a single dwelling unit, located in a three story stacked container structure supported as a cantilevered extension toward Park Street. There is no on-site parking for this unit. The developer proposes to use off-site parking located approximate 500 feet away. The practicality of this arrangement may be questioned, and even this limited solution may not be permanent.
8. The developer has attempted to link the "container project" with the shipping history of Alameda. To the degree that there might be such a link, it would apply to the Waterfront Subdistrict on the estuary. But this project is in the Gateway Subdistrict, not in the Waterfront Subdistrict, which extends along the north side of Blanding Avenue across the street from the project.
9. In a presentation to the AAPS Board the developer went to some lengths to discount assertions that this is "cheap construction", responding to the observation that it "looks cheap". He stated flatly that it's more expensive to build with containers. We have no reason to question that claim, but feel it's relevant: If the developer were persuaded to develop a different design, he would not suffer a financial penalty.
10. There was considerable discussion concerning the difficulty of building on such a "small and difficult site". In fact, the site is 50 feet (facing Park Street) by 137+ feet (along Blanding Avenue). The site is level and essentially clear. The "difficulty" appears to be more related to the developer's desire to build with rigid containers. There is much less flexibility with these components than with more conventional building methods. The site itself does not appear to present any unusual challenges.

Please contact Jim Smallman at (714)318-4106 or [smallman\\_james@hotmail.com](mailto:smallman_james@hotmail.com) if you would like to discuss these comments.

Sincerely,

Christopher Buckley, President  
Alameda Architectural Preservation Society

#### **By electronic transmission:**

cc: City Manager

Debbie Potter, Andrew Thomas and David Sablan, Community Development Department  
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