

## Planning Commission Staff Report

March 23, 2011  
Item 6.a.

**SUBJECT:** PREV-806

**APPLICANT:** Charles Huff

**PROPERTY OWNER:** Mark Kearns

**PURPOSE:** Work session to review and receive comments on a preliminary application to construct an approximately 1,752 square foot, three-story dwelling unit with an attached two-car garage and an approximately 975 square foot basement for commercial storage (Specialty Inspections) at the rear of the subject property.

**GENERAL PLAN:** Retail/Highway/Service Commercial/Business and Professional Offices

**SPECIFIC PLAN:** Downtown Specific Plan (Land use designation is Downtown Commercial)

**ZONING:** Central Commercial (C-C), Downtown Revitalization, Core Area Overlay District

**LOCATION:** 261 Spring Street

**EXHIBITS:**

- A. Discussion Questions and Topics
- B. Project Plans and Narrative, dated Received February 24, 2011
- C. Pleasanton Heritage Association Comments
- D. Location Map
- E. Noticing Map

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### BACKGROUND

Charles Huff, on behalf of Mark Kearns (owner of Specialty Inspections), has submitted for a Preliminary Review application to construct a three-story dwelling unit and basement at 261 Spring Street. The basement is for storage of materials of Specialty Inspections, the first story of the proposed structure consists of a two-car garage, and the second and third levels consist of a residential dwelling unit.

The Downtown Specific Plan and the Downtown Design Guidelines outline criteria and parameters related to three-story structures in the downtown area. Three-story buildings are

considered on a case-by-case basis and must meet the criteria outlined in the Downtown Specific Plan. Staff has discussed these criteria with the applicant and has recommended that the structure be reduced to two stories above grade, particularly given constraints such as the lot size, lot configuration, and surrounding development. The applicant, however, would like to propose a three-story structure with basement.

The project is before the Planning Commission as a workshop to receive comments and feedback from the Commission members regarding the number of stories, proposed architectural style, and overall compatibility with the neighborhood. The work session will also provide the public with an opportunity to comment on the proposed plans. A list of discussion topics and questions are included as Exhibit A to this report.

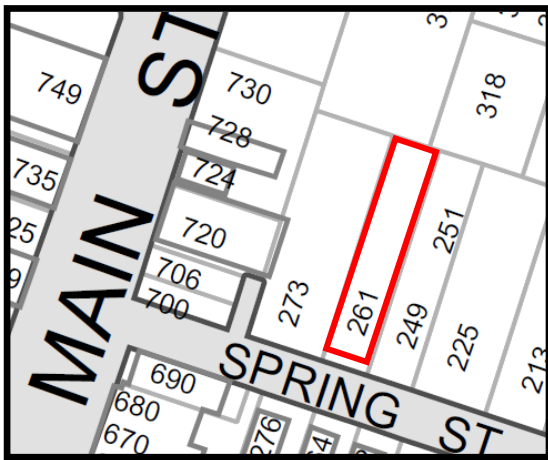
### SITE DESCRIPTION

The subject property is located on the north side of Spring Street and consists of a single-story structure in the front, parking in the middle of the parcel, and an undeveloped area towards the rear of the parcel. Access to on-site parking is provided by a driveway along the western property line. The Mission Revival style building in the front of the property was originally constructed as a residence, but was demolished to the foundation in 2006 and rebuilt as a commercial office building that substantially matched the original building design. The property is bounded on the north and east by residential uses, on the west by a Pilates studio and surface parking lot, and on the south by Spring Street.

Spring Street gradually inclines as it progresses east from Main Street. As shown in Figure 1 below, the street has mainly bungalow-style structures, some of which are used as residences and some of which have been converted to commercial uses. The architectural style of many of the structures on Spring Street is Mission Revival. Spring Street is noted in the General Plan, the Downtown Specific Plan, and the Downtown Design Guidelines as a historic neighborhood. Single-story structures of varying architecture surround the subject property along mutual property lines.

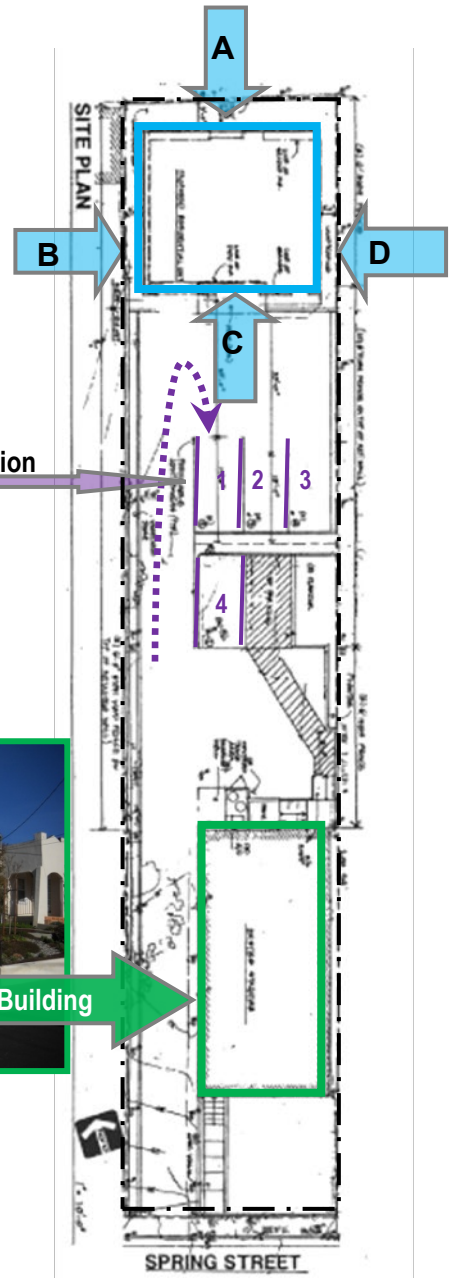


**FIGURE 1:** Buildings in vicinity of subject property on Spring Street



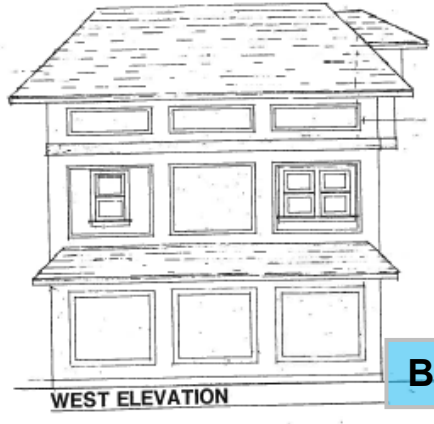
Existing Building

Proposed Modification to On-site Parking (Vehicular access to parking shown with curved arrow)



A

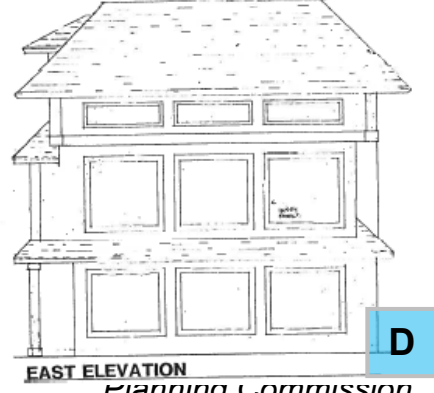
FIGURE 2: Location map, Proposed Site Plan, and Elevation Drawings of Proposed Structure



B



C



D

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The applicant proposes to construct an approximately 1,752 square foot, three-story dwelling unit with an attached two-car garage and an approximately 975 square foot basement for commercial storage at the rear of the subject property. Access to the garage (the garage doors are on the south elevation) is provided from the existing driveway along the western boundary of the property. The proposed building is situated towards the rear of the parcel with a 5-foot and 3-foot setback from the rear and side property lines, respectively.

The basement is proposed to be used for storage of materials associated with Specialty Inspections, such as lumber, files, tools, plumbing materials, safety equipment, and hardware. A complete list of these items is provided on Sheet 1 of the project plans. Access to the basement is provided via an interior staircase from the garage level. The floor plan for the garage indicates space to park two vehicles, potential storage area, and an interior staircase that leads to the second level. The second level consists of a gathering room, office, kitchen, powder room, and laundry room, and the third level consists of two bedrooms and two full bathrooms. A deck facing south (towards the middle of the lot and towards Spring Street) is proposed on both the second and third levels of the proposed dwelling unit.

Four non-ADA-spaces are currently located where the back-up space is shown on the proposed plans. The project scope entails removing these parking spaces and creating three parking spaces directly across from the existing ADA-space and planter area.

No modifications to the existing building at the front of the property are proposed with this application.

## **DISCUSSION**

The following sections aim to provide discussion topics and analysis of key issues. A list of these discussion topics and specific questions regarding the proposal are attached to this report as Exhibit A for the Planning Commission's consideration and discussion.

**Downtown Specific Plan** – *Does the proposed project meet the criteria in the Downtown Specific Plan for three-story structures? Is a three-story structure appropriate for this site?*

The Downtown Specific Plan outlines several Land Use Policies and Programs which limit buildings to two-stories in the Downtown and provide criteria that three-story buildings, if proposed, must meet. Therefore, three-story buildings are considered on a case-by-case basis.

The following text is an excerpt from the Downtown Specific Plan regarding three-story buildings:

A major attraction of the Downtown is the small and pedestrian scale of historic buildings. Existing buildings on Main Street generally do not exceed two stories. This height establishes a scale of development which should be generally followed throughout the Downtown Commercial area.

1. In order to preserve the historic character of the Downtown, new or remodeled buildings within the Downtown Commercial area should be limited to two stories, except three-story buildings may be allowed on a case-by-case basis, subject to the following criteria:
  - A. The building must be pedestrian in scale, as determined through the design review process, and shall include design features such as first-story storefront windows, recessed entries, building details, and awnings.
  - B. The building must be designed to minimize its three-story appearance through use of techniques such as dormer windows, stepping back upper floors, and using design features between building levels to assist in maintaining an overall horizontal design character to the building.
  - C. The building must conform with the Municipal Code height limits.

Criterion A requires that three-story buildings must be pedestrian in scale. The building proposed with this submittal does not appear to meet this requirement since the building is recessed towards the rear of the parcel and does not include design features such as storefront windows and awnings. Staff recognizes that the applicant's ability to add design features such as these is limited given the proposed residential use of the building. However, the location of the building at the rear of the parcel and the use of the first floor as a garage is not in keeping with the intent of this criterion. Additionally, the tall and narrow building is not pedestrian in scale.

Criterion B requires that a three-story building must be designed to minimize its three-story appearance. Staff does not feel that the building conforms to this criterion as currently designed. The property is deeper than it is wide (approximate dimensions are 200-feet deep by 38.7-feet wide). This lot configuration results in a building that is fairly narrow. The upper floors of the proposed building do not step back from the floors below. Also, wall dormers are proposed, which do not decrease mass in the same manner as roof dormers. Staff finds that the narrow width of the property and the proposed three stories makes it challenging to design a structure that is well integrated to the site and that maintains an overall horizontal design character to the building.

Criterion C requires that the proposed building comply with Pleasanton Municipal Code (PMC) height limits. The height limit in the C-C zoning district is 40-feet, as measured vertically from the average elevation of the natural grade of the ground covered by the structure to the deck line of a mansard roof. The proposed structure is 32-feet as drawn and thus complies with this requirement of the Municipal Code.

### **Building Design – *Is the building design appropriate for the subject site?***

Objective 3 of the Historic Preservation chapter of the Downtown Specific Plan (page 66) states that the design of new buildings should be compatible with the Downtown's traditional design character and scale. On page 67, the Downtown Specific Plan also notes that the design of new buildings should draw upon the primary exterior features of the Downtown's traditional design character in terms of architectural style and materials, colors, details of construction, height, floor area, bulk, massing, and setbacks. It mentions that these building elements should be consistent with those elements of buildings in the immediate

neighborhood, and the design of new buildings should not represent a significant departure from the existing neighborhood character.

The Downtown Design Guidelines, as noted on page 35, encourage *two-story* homes to be designed in a manner to minimize building height in predominantly single-story neighborhoods. The Downtown Design Guidelines also state that the massing and architectural style of the proposed structure should be consistent with that of surrounding development. The proposed design of the building features a stucco exterior, composition shingle roofing, stucco relief panels, and windows styles ranging from fixed, clerestory, and single-hung. Dormer windows are proposed on the third floor. Since the application is preliminary, a formal color and materials board has not been included with the submittal. Details regarding the type of and colors of architectural features such as windows, the front door, garage door and roofing would be required upon submittal for Design Review.

The design of the proposed structure is a deviation from the existing Mission Revival cottage near the front of the property. In particular, the roof style and architectural details are different from the existing building. Staff finds that the site will appear better integrated if the proposed structure at the rear of the parcel is designed to be consistent in appearance and architecture to the existing Mission Revival style structure at the front of the subject property. The Downtown Specific Plan and Downtown Design Guidelines outline parameters related to new construction of residential structures and also provide guidance related to architectural details such as roof-style, materials, windows, architectural details, et cetera.

**Existing Site Configuration, Parking, and Proposed Residential Unit – Are the proposed modifications to the site plan and parking appropriate? Is the proposed size of the residential unit acceptable? Should the proposed setbacks be increased?**

The proposed parking configuration, orientation, and location are not optimal as all three of the new spaces may be difficult to access, as shown on the proposed site plan in Figure 2. The proposed configuration may result in an awkward access since a vehicle would have to make a sharp turn (in limited space) or a multiple-point turn in order to pull into a parking space. Figure 3 shows the existing configuration of the on-site parking. The four parking spaces in addition to the existing ADA-parking space are currently located directly adjacent and perpendicular to the undeveloped area at the rear of the property. This configuration provides easier access to the parking spaces.

Staff has suggested that the applicant eliminate the proposed first-floor garage and use the existing uncovered parking on the site, thus reducing the structure by one story. The living area of the proposed residential unit is approximately 1,752-square feet. While both of the proposed bedrooms are on the third floor, the office shown on the second-story floor plan could easily be used as a bedroom, and thus an additional 50-square feet of private open space would be required. Setbacks are not required in the



**FIGURE 3:**  
Existing site configuration  
(Vehicular access to parking  
shown with curved arrow)

Central-Commercial (C-C) district; however the Planning Commission may want to discuss whether or not the proposed setbacks (5-feet to the rear and 3-feet to the sides) are adequate or should be increased given the proposed height and number of stories.

**Compatibility with Adjacent Structures – Is the proposed building compatible with adjacent structures?**

The site is surrounded by single-story structures to the west, north, and east. Figure 4 below shows photographs of the structures on the adjoining properties.



**FIGURE 4:** Existing structures on adjoining properties as viewed from the subject property

The proposed building is three-stories above grade, approximately 32-feet in height, and situated 5-feet from the rear and 3-feet from the side property lines. The height and massing of the proposed building may be significantly disproportional to the structures in immediate vicinity. The applicant has noted, however, that other taller structures exist in the downtown and has provided examples in the project narrative (Exhibit B). A photo of a building farther east of the subject site, 254 Ray Street, is



**FIGURE 5:** Photograph of 254 Ray Street as viewed from subject property

shown in Figure 5. The building in the photograph is of a two-unit apartment building located at the rear of the property. The construction drawings for the project note that the highest ridgeline for this building ranges from 29-feet 1.5-inches to 28-feet 6.5-inches in height, depending on the grade. The apartment units are two-stories, but have staircase access to the attic.

**Story Poles – Does the structure appear too tall or massive from adjoining properties or adjacent streets?**

In an effort to demonstrate the height of the proposed structure, the applicant installed story poles. The tallest portion of the story poles represents the highest ridgeline of the proposed building; however staff has not verified the height of the story poles. Additionally, the proposed finished grade is unknown at this time and could affect the perceived height of the structure. The photos in Figure 6 (page 8) show views of the building as seen from various vantage points. The degree to which the story poles are visible depends on the location. In some of the pictures, the story poles are difficult to see due to the substantial distance from which the photograph was taken. Existing mature landscaping assists to screen the story poles from nearby streets, but will not screen the proposed building from adjoining properties. Also, the story poles have little massing and are not three-dimensional. Both of these qualities reduce



the visibility of the story poles, and an actual building w properties and from the locations shown in the photos.



**FIGURE 6:** Photographs of story poles

**Pleasanton Municipal Code Requirements**

The requirements of the Pleasanton Municipal Code (PMC) would apply to proposed construction on the subject property. The site is also located within the Core Area Overlay District, which provides for flexibility of certain code requirements for the project if it is a rental unit.

The chart below briefly outlines how the proposed project meets the requirements of the C-C District and the Core Area Overlay District.

	<b>P.M.C. REQUIREMENT</b>	<b>PROPOSED PROJECT</b>
<b>Setbacks</b>	None, unless projecting over public property	5-feet from rear property line 3-feet from side property lines
<b>Maximum Height of Structure</b>	40-feet	32-feet
<b>Basic Floor Area Ratio</b>	300%	Existing building: Approximately 1,092 s.f.  Proposed unit: 1,752 s.f.  Storage area/stairwell in garage: Approximately 341 s.f.  Lot size: Approximately 8,024 s.f.  F.A.R.: $3,185/8,024 = 39.7\%$
<b>Group Usable Open Space per Dwelling Unit</b>	None required <sup>1</sup>	None
<b>Private Open Space</b>	50-square feet per bedroom for units with two or more bedrooms; must meet minimum dimensions of 5-feet for aboveground decks and 8-feet for ground-level areas <sup>2</sup>	Second floor deck: Approximately 5-feet by 10-feet (50 s.f.)  Third floor deck: Approximately 7-feet by 9-feet (63 s.f.)
<b>Parking</b>	Existing building in front: 2 parking spaces Proposed dwelling unit: 2-parking spaces; no visitor parking is required and parking may be uncovered	6 total on-site spaces, including 4 uncovered surface parking spaces and 2 garage spaces

<sup>1</sup> Not required for qualifying projects in the Core Area Overlay District

<sup>2</sup> The proposed office on the second floor could easily be used as a bedroom and thus an additional 50-square feet of open space would be required. If the rear yard setback were increased in 8-feet, then this space could be

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counted as open space.

### **Pleasanton Heritage Association Comments**

The Pleasanton Heritage Association (PHA) reviewed plans for the proposed project and provided comments. The comments in their entirety are enclosed with this staff report as Exhibit C. In short, the PHA's comments are related to the design and architecture of the proposed building and how they believe it differs from the policies listed in the Downtown Specific Plan. Additionally, the PHA commented on the height, massing and scale of the proposed building and stated that it does not appear to be in keeping with the other structures on Spring Street and in the immediate vicinity of the subject site.

### **Pleasanton Downtown Association Comments**

The Pleasanton Downtown Association reviewed the project during its meeting in January, 2011. The PDA supported the project as long as the City regulations were met and adjacent neighbors did not have objections.

### **PUBLIC NOTICE**

Notice of this workshop was sent to all property owners and occupants within 1,000 feet of the subject property. A resident that lives in close vicinity of the project and noticed the story poles inquired about the scope of the project, the proposed height of the building, the proposed distance to property lines, and location of windows. The resident commented that the structure appears very tall, is in close proximity to adjacent residential buildings, and would have windows looking into adjacent properties, but did not submit formal comments.

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission consider the proposed project and provide comments and direction.

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