



## STAFF REPORT

**DATE:** JUNE 28, 2023

**TO:** PLANNING COMMISSION

**FROM:** JENNIFER PAIGE, AICP, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

**SUBJECT:** PROPOSED CENTRAL DISTRICT SPECIFIC PLAN

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### RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Planning Commission:

1. **Recommend** that the City Council consider an Addendum to the 2015 Pasadena General Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR), along with the EIR, and find that the Addendum properly discloses only minor technical changes or additions to the EIR, and none of the conditions triggering a subsequent or supplemental EIR are present, as set forth in State CEQA Guidelines Section 15164; and
2. **Recommend** that the City Council make the Findings for Approval for the General Plan Map Amendment, Specific Plan Amendment, and Zoning Code Map and Text Amendments and approve the proposed Central District Specific Plan. Amendments to the Zoning Code Text also include technical changes in the previously adopted Lincoln Avenue, East Colorado, and South Fair Oaks Specific Plan for internal consistency.

### BACKGROUND:

In 2018, the City initiated the *Our Pasadena – Putting the Plan in Motion* program to update the City's eight specific plan areas. The program's primary goal is to establish objective regulations and standards that will shape the built environment within Pasadena's eight planning areas in accordance with the General Plan and its guiding principles. Three of the eight specific plan updates have been adopted by the City Council (Lincoln Avenue [2021], East Colorado [2021], and South Fair Oaks [2022]). An update to the North Lake Specific Plan was presented to the Planning Commission in

May 2023. The remaining specific plan updates, East Pasadena, Fair Oaks/Orange Grove, and Lamanda Park are anticipated to be presented to the Planning Commission by this winter.

The update to the Central District Specific Plan is the fourth plan to be presented to the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission has held three study sessions on the Central District Specific Plan update, as follows:

- On December 8, 2021, staff presented information on the planning and community engagement process and feedback received, as well as an overview of the draft plan vision, plan boundaries, land use regulations, and development and public realm standards. The December staff report is available using the following link: [December 8, 2021 Staff Report](#).
- On June 22, 2022, staff presented more detailed information on the draft plan vision, potential changes to the plan boundary, new goals and policies, and the revised draft land use regulations and development and public realm standards. The June staff report is available using the following link: [June 22, 2022 Staff Report](#).
- On February 22, 2023, staff presented the draft proposed plan with goals and policies; land use regulations; objective development, design, and public realm standards; implementation actions; design guidelines for the public realm, private realm, and sub-district design guidelines (2004 design guidelines); and design guidance for tree selection. The February staff report is available using the following link: [February 22, 2023 Staff Report](#).

At the February 2023 study session, the Planning Commission discussed and received public comments on the draft proposed plan. Comments from the Planning Commission focused on incorporating the 2004 design guidelines into the plan, plan implementation, de-emphasizing vehicular parking requirements, and expanding permitted land uses. The proposed plan addresses feedback received, including the following:

- 2004 Design Guidelines – A subcommittee of the Planning Commission was formed to discuss incorporating the 2004 design guidelines into the plan. Based on the work of the subcommittee, the draft proposed plan was revised to incorporate new goals, policies, text boxes, and objective development and design standards. The revisions are highlighted throughout the proposed plan. A table was also prepared to document where the 2004 design guidelines are incorporated into the new plan; refer to Attachment D. Based on this work, Appendix A.3, which previously included the 2004 design guidelines, was removed from the proposed plan.

- Plan Implementation – A new action item was added to the implementation table to note that staff will provide an annual update to the Planning Commission on the status of the implementation actions to guide discussions on future capital improvement projects and/or studies. The implementation actions were also reorganized, and a new column was added to the table to identify potential funding sources and relevant Capital Improvement Program information. Refer to Table 7.1-1 of Chapter 7 of the proposed plan.
- Vehicular Parking – The current off-street vehicular parking requirements were revised. Given that most of the Central District is within a TOD area, the proposed plan requires less parking for most uses and no additional parking for projects within designated historic resources or changes of use in structures built before 1970. Parking reductions for projects within one-half mile of a Metro station continue to apply for residential and nonresidential uses. Also, shared and unbundled parking is permitted to promote more efficient use of parking spaces. Where parking minimums conflict with state law, state law shall control. Refer to Section 6.4 for the parking requirements.
- Allowable Land Uses – The land use table was updated to allow, by-right, additional residential uses, such as boarding houses, religious facilities with affordable housing, limited emergency shelters, and low-barrier navigation centers. Additional revisions are highlighted in Table 4.3-1 of Chapter 4 of the proposed plan.

The proposed Central District Specific Plan is available in Attachment A. The current 2004 Central District Specific Plan is included in Attachment B. For a summary of the community engagement process and public and commission feedback, refer to Attachment C.

## **PROPOSED CENTRAL DISTRICT SPECIFIC PLAN:**

### Plan Boundary, Vision, Subareas, Goals, and Policies

The proposed Central District Specific Plan generally encompasses the area bound by the I-210 freeway to the north, Pasadena Avenue to the west, California Avenue to the south, and Wilson Avenue to the east (See Map 1), slightly smaller than the 2004 plan. The plan area includes two Metro A Line Stations (formerly Metro L and Gold Line), Del Mar and Memorial Park. Lake Station is located just outside of the plan area. The South Fair Oaks and East Colorado Specific Plans border the Central District Specific Plan area. The Fair Oaks/Orange Grove and North Lake Specific Plans are north of the I-210 freeway.

**Key changes from the draft plan boundary presented in February 2023:** None

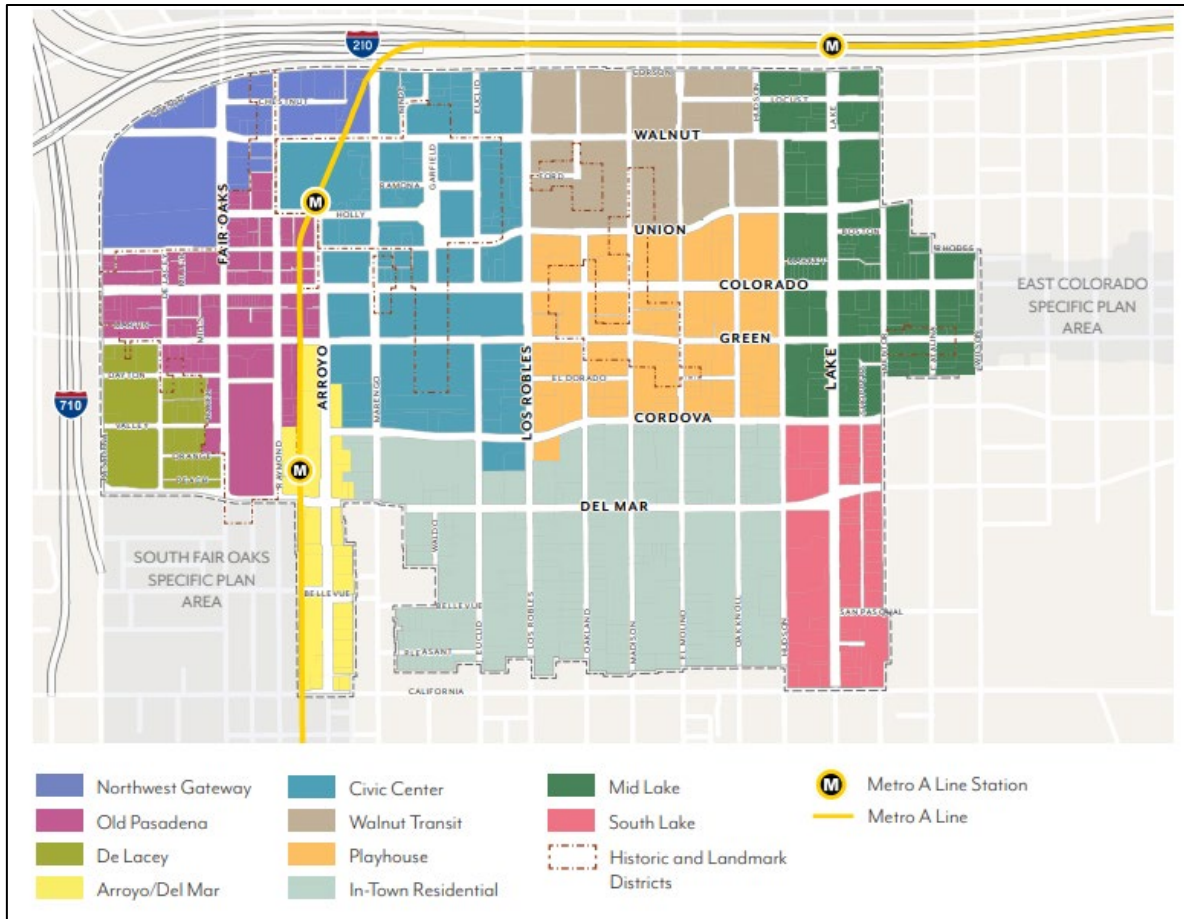
Map 1. Proposed Plan Boundary



The Central District Specific Plan area is envisioned as the City’s vibrant downtown, providing diverse economic, civic, cultural, entertainment, and residential opportunities. This district is intended to be a place to work, live, shop, learn, and play for all generations and abilities. To guide the implementation of the Central District Specific Plan area, the plan is organized into 10 subareas (See Map 2). Each subarea includes goals and policies to guide decision-makers when reviewing development and public improvement projects.

**Key changes from the draft plan presented in February 2023:** The goals and policies were previously grouped into four topics, Public Realm and Historic Identity, Development and Design, Economic Development, and Subareas. As a result of incorporating the 2004 design guidelines into the plan, the goals and policies were regrouped into five topics. Public Realm and Historic Identity each became their own topic. New and revised goals and policies are highlighted in the proposed plan.

Map 2. Proposed Central District Specific Plan Subareas



### Land Use Regulations

The most notable land use change compared to the adopted 2004 plan is the allowance of residential uses along Lake Avenue, north of Green Street. The intent is to encourage a mix of commercial and residential uses near the Metro Lake Station and existing businesses to promote economic vitality for the City and provide housing opportunities, neighborhood amenities, and services for the surrounding community.

**Key changes from the draft plan presented in February 2023:** The boundaries between CD-MU-G and CD-MU-N districts around Central Park were modified to expand the CD-MU-G. Refer to Map 4.2-1 for the updated Zoning Districts. The land use table was updated to allow additional residential uses, such as boarding houses, religious facilities with affordable housing, limited emergency shelters, and low-barrier navigation centers. Additional revisions are highlighted in Table 4.3-1 of Chapter 4 of the proposed plan.

## Public Realm Standards

The proposed plan refines the current minimum sidewalk width requirements to support pedestrian mobility and amenities within the public realm and reinforce the existing historic character. Refer to Map 5.1-1 of Chapter 5 of the proposed plan for minimum sidewalk widths. Landscaped parkways, street trees, tree-well dimensions, and root zone volume provisions are also included in the proposed plan to improve tree health and increase tree canopy. Recommendations for potential new tree species along specific corridors in the plan area are included in Appendix A.2 of the proposed plan to guide discussions between the City and community when updating the Master Street tree Plan for the area.

**Key changes from the draft plan presented in February 2023:** References to the draft Pedestrian Plan and existing 2004 design guidelines were removed from the proposed plan. Existing design guidelines related to the public realm were incorporated into Chapters 3 (Vision, Goals, and Policies) and 5 (Public Realm Standards) of the proposed plan as new goals, policies, and text boxes and are highlighted in the plan.

## Development and Design Standards

### *Building Height, Upper Story Stepbacks, Transitional Height, and Floor Area Ratio*

In general, the proposed plan maintains the current building height limits throughout the plan area. The tallest building height allowances are located near the Metro Del Mar and Lake Stations and along the eastern portions of Colorado Boulevard at 75 feet, with heights tapering down in areas south of Cordova Street at 36 or 40 feet (55 feet with height averaging). Refer to Map 6.1-3 of Chapter 6 of the proposed plan for building heights.

**Key changes from the draft plan presented in February 2023:** Allowable heights were increased in two areas: (1) two parcels north of Union Street, east of Los Robles Avenue, went from 51 feet (66 feet height average) to 63 feet; and (2) parcels generally bounded by Central Court between De Lacey and Fair Oaks Avenue went from 51 feet (66 feet with height averaging) to 75 feet (90 feet with height averaging). The Floor Area Ratio (FAR) was also increased for the area south of Central Court from 2.25 to 3.0 to correlate with the increase in height and for the area south of California Boulevard from 0.75 to 1.0 to align with the General Plan Land Use designation.

### *Street Setbacks for Buildings*

The proposed plan refines current street setback requirements to enhance the pedestrian experience. The existing plan currently allows a 0-foot setback throughout most of the plan area. The proposed plan will continue to allow a 0-foot setback in certain areas to reinforce the existing historic character and will require a 5-foot

minimum setback outside of these historic areas. Refer to Map 6.1-5 of Chapter 6 of the proposed plan for street setbacks.

**Key changes from the draft plan presented in February 2023:** None

#### *Historic Adjacency Transition Massing*

The proposed plan introduces objective standards for new development adjacent to historic resources in addition to the height transition standards that are in the current plan. The standards are designed to complement and enhance the area's historic character. Refer to Figure 6.1-7 of Chapter 6 of the proposed plan for setback and encroachment plane requirements.

**Key changes from the draft plan presented in February 2023:** None

#### *Modulation*

The proposed plan introduces objective standards intended to reduce the scale and “blockiness” of new construction through façade breaks and modulated facades to implement the existing 2004 design guidelines. The standards are written to be general enough not to mandate a particular architectural style and have been analyzed to ensure feasibility with both traditional and modern styles. Modulation standards may be modified through the Design Review process if a project complies with the required findings. Refer to Section 6.1.7 of the proposed plan for modulation requirements.

**Key changes from the draft plan presented in February 2023:** A new standard was added to clarify that planes separated by a gap of 20 feet in width and 20 feet in depth are considered separate facades. A new text box highlighting architectural features such as cornices, belt lines, and fenestration patterns was added to the building mass and modulation section to incorporate the 2004 design guidelines. The text box focusing on façade breaks and variations was removed from the plan. An exemption to the modulation requirements was added to encourage new development to include traditional architectural features such as 4-inch recessed windows, a base, middle, and top, and the use of brick or stone. The alternative compliance for projects seeking to modify or reduce the modulation requirements through the Design Review process remained in the proposed plan. Revisions are highlighted in the proposed plan.

#### *Ground Floor Frontages and Design*

The proposed plan introduces pedestrian-oriented ground floor requirements for mixed-use areas to promote enhanced frontages that engage the public realm and contribute to the Central District's overall identity, sense of place, and walkability. Objective design standards, such as pedestrian entrances, minimum ground floor height, ground floor transparency, shade structures, raised stoops, patios, awnings/canopies, arcades/galleries, and exterior fixtures are included in the proposed plan to implement the existing 2004 design guidelines. Refer to Section 6.2 of the proposed plan for frontage requirements.

**Key changes from the draft plan presented in February 2023:** New requirements for exterior fixtures, such as lighting and drainage, are highlighted in the proposed plan. The requirements were added to implement the existing 2004 design guidelines.

### *Open Space, Paseos, and Plazas*

The proposed plan revises current open space requirements to improve open space access for residents, businesses, students, and visitors. Private and common open space requirements for residential development are based on the number of bedrooms in each proposed unit, ensuring adequate open space for residents within each building. Common open space is also required for commercial projects, creating amenities for visitors and employees. In addition to the benefit of providing open space for building users, the requirements also contribute to better building modulation and massing with patios, balconies, and courtyards.

Another significant provision in the proposed plan is the new Publicly Accessible Open Space (“PAOS”) requirement. This requirement builds on the historic legacy of the Central District’s network of publicly accessible open spaces, commonly known as paseos and plazas. The proposed plan also includes a provision that allows the review authority to modify standards through the Design Review process, so long as the open space is accessible to the public, functional, and includes features such as trees and landscaping. Refer to Section 6.3 of the proposed plan for the open space requirements.

**Key changes from the draft plan presented in February 2023:** Added a new plaza location for the northeast corner of Lake Avenue and California Boulevard. Refer to Map 6.3-1 for the plaza location. Standards were also updated. Revisions are highlighted in the proposed plan.

### *Parking, Vehicle Access, Layout, and Design*

The proposed plan revises the current off-street parking requirements by establishing an appropriate number of parking spaces by land use, size of the development, and location. It requires less parking for certain uses and no additional parking for projects within designated historic resources or changes of use in structures built before 1970. Also, shared and unbundled parking is permitted. Where parking minimums conflict with state law, state law shall control. Objective design standards, like vehicle access, layout, and the design of new parking structures are included in the proposed plan. Refer to Section 6.4 for the parking requirements.

**Key changes from the draft plan presented in February 2023:** New requirements for vehicular entrances to structured parking, ramps, gates, facades, and heights are highlighted in the proposed plan. The requirements were added to implement the existing 2004 design guidelines.



## Implementation & Administration

The proposed plan is primarily implemented through the adoption of the plan's new land use regulations and public realm, design, and development standards that align private sector investment with the plan's vision, goals, and policies. In addition, the proposed plan includes targeted action items intended to guide decision-makers and prioritize the implementation of the plan. These action items reflect feedback received from the various City commissions and the community. Refer to Table 7.1-1 of Chapter 7 of the proposed plan.

**Key changes from the draft plan presented in February 2023:** A new action item was added to note that staff will provide an annual update on the status of the implementation actions to the Planning Commission to guide discussions on future capital improvement projects and/or studies. The implementation actions were reorganized, and a new column was added to the table to include potential funding sources and relevant Capital Improvement Program information.

## Appendices

The proposed plan includes a glossary of definitions and design guidance for tree selection as appendices to the plan. During the specific plan update process, opportunities were identified to better align Central District's street trees with the plan's vision, goals, and policies related to shade, climate resilience, stormwater capture, and supporting a vibrant public realm. Appendix A.2 of the proposed plan includes recommendations for potential new species for certain corridors in the plan area that are not managed through an adopted streetscape plan and demonstrate a need to enhance the tree canopy.

**Key changes from the draft plan presented in February 2023:** Appendix A.3, which included the 2004 design guidelines, was removed from the proposed plan. As noted, these guidelines have become policies, notes, and/or objective standards in the new plan.

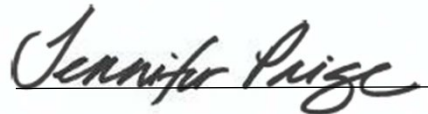
## **ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:**

An Initial Study and Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was prepared for the Pasadena General Plan in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and certified by the City Council on August 17, 2015. An addendum to the EIR has been prepared analyzing the update to the Central District Specific Plan in compliance with Section 15164 (Addendum to an EIR or Negative Declaration) of the CEQA guidelines (Title 14, Chapter 3, Article 11). The addendum found that the project revisions will not result in any potentially significant impacts not already analyzed in the EIR. Refer to Attachment E for the Addendum to the General Plan EIR. For information on the 2015 General Plan EIR refer to Attachment F.

**CONCLUSION:**

The proposed plan for the Central District area would replace the existing 2004 plan, refining the plan boundaries, vision, goals, policies, regulations, objective design and development standards, and action items. This plan seeks to facilitate and encourage development and improvements to realize the vision and objectives for the plan area, factoring in community, stakeholder, and commission input throughout the outreach process.

Respectfully submitted,



JENNIFER PAIGE, AICP  
Director of Planning & Community  
Development Department

Prepared by:



Anita Cerna  
Principal Planner

Reviewed by:



Luis Rocha  
Planning Manager

Attachments: (8)

- Attachment A – 2023 Proposed Central District Specific Plan
- Attachment B – 2004 Central District Specific Plan
- Attachment C – Community Engagement and Public Feedback
- Attachment D – Design Guidelines Comparison Table
- Attachment E – Addendum to the General Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR)
- Attachment F – 2015 General Plan EIR and Appendices
- Attachment G – Recommended General Plan and Zoning Code Amendments
- Attachment H – Required Findings for General Plan and Zoning Code Amendments

Also Available at the following link: <https://www.ourpasadena.org/CDSP-PC-HR-062823>