



STAFF REPORT

DATE: FEBRUARY 22, 2023

TO: PLANNING COMMISSION

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

SUBJECT: DRAFT PROPOSED CENTRAL DISTRICT SPECIFIC PLAN

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive the staff report and provide feedback on the draft proposed plan for the Central District Specific Plan area. There is no action required at this time. Subsequent to this public meeting, staff will return to the Planning Commission with the proposed Central District Specific Plan for review and recommendation to City Council.

BACKGROUND:

In 2018, the City initiated the *Our Pasadena – Putting the Plan in Motion* program to review and 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 specific plan areas in accordance with the General Plan and its guiding principles, adopted by the City Council. Between 2018 and 2020, staff held a variety of in-person and virtual community engagement events, including open houses, workshops, and walking tours to solicit feedback. Staff also meet with other City departments and commissions for further guidance on the preparation of the new specific plans. In 2020, staff presented the first specific plan update, the Lincoln Avenue Specific Plan, to the Planning Commission. The following year, in 2021, staff presented the East Colorado and South Fair Oaks Specific Plans. The three specific plans have been approved by the City Council.

The update to the Central District Specific Plan is the fourth plan to be presented to the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission has held two 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 on the Planning Commission Past Agendas Archive page via this 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 also available via this link: [June 22, 2022 Staff Report](#).

During both study sessions, the Planning Commission discussed and received public comments on the update of the Plan. Staff has prepared an updated revised draft of the Plan which considers various factors, including feedback from the community, stakeholders, and the commission. Refer to Attachment A for the latest draft proposed Central District Specific Plan. For the 2004 Central District Specific Plan, refer to Attachment B; for a summary of the community engagement process and public and commission feedback, refer to Attachment C.

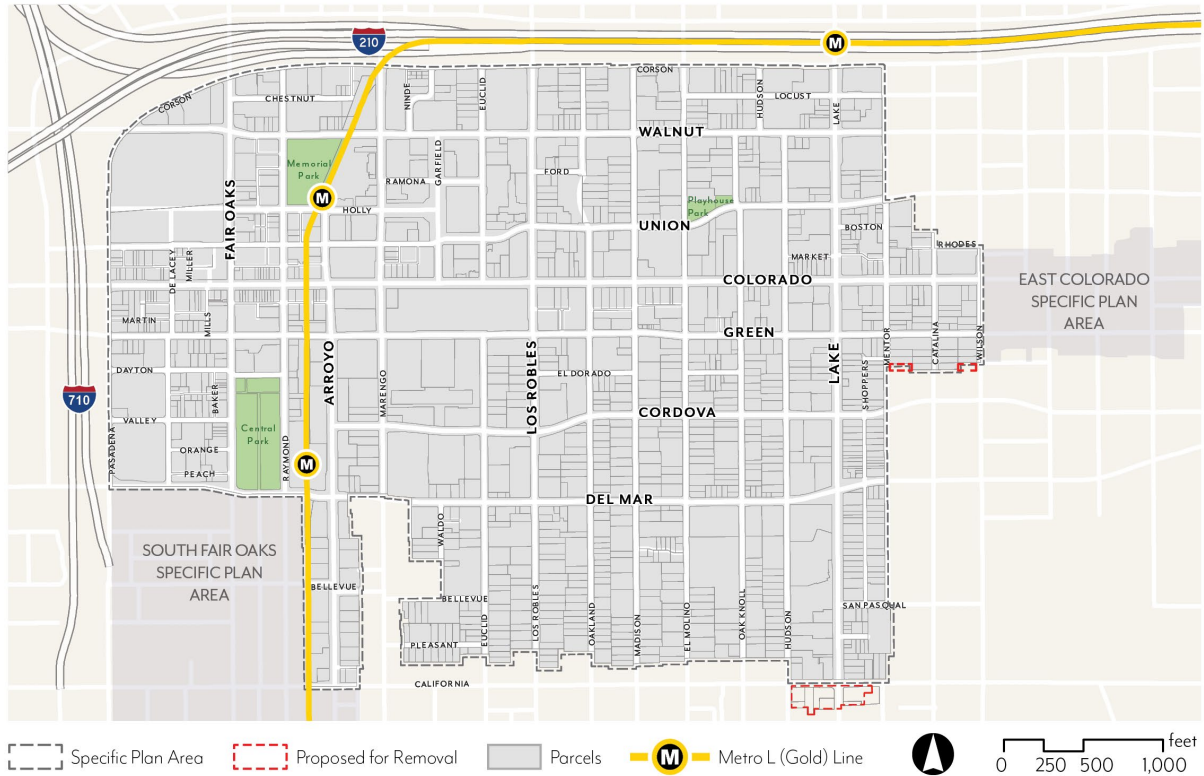
CENTRAL DISTRICT SPECIFIC PLAN UPDATE:

Plan Boundary, Vision, and Subareas

The 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. The plan area includes two Metro L Line Stations, 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 proposed plan boundary covers a smaller geographic area than presented to the Planning Commission during the previous study sessions. Based on feedback from the Planning Commission, the Plan boundary has been revised to remove parcels located south of California Boulevard, near the Lake Avenue intersection, from the plan area to establish a defining boundary between southern Lake Avenue and the adjoining residential neighborhood. In addition, staff recommends the removal of parcels located south of Green Street near Mentor Avenue from the plan area to avoid splitting existing lots developed with multi-family residential uses. Map 1 shows the new proposed plan boundary.

Map 1. Proposed Plan Boundary for the Central District Specific Plan



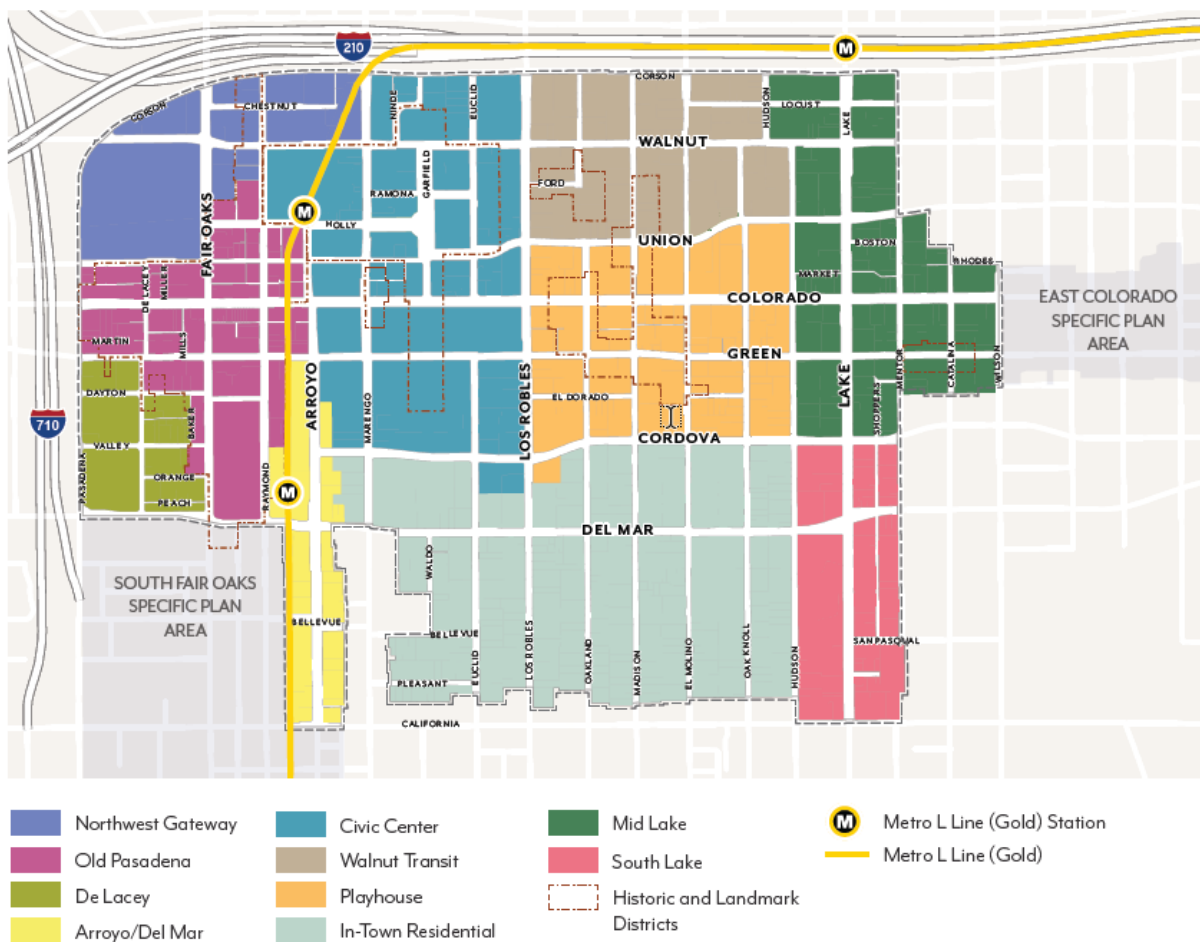
The Central District Specific Plan area is envisioned by the community as the City’s vibrant downtown, providing a diversity of economic, civic, cultural, entertainment, and residential opportunities. This district is intended to be a place to work, live, shop, learn, and play for all generations and abilities. Based on feedback received, the proposed plan outlines key objectives intended to establish desired outcomes and provide general direction for achieving those outcomes. A summary of the plan objectives is as follows:

- **Sustainable Growth** - Support a mix of residential and commercial development near public transit and existing services to encourage walkability and transit usage.
- **High-Quality Housing** - Well-designed multi-family housing that creates varied and affordable options for the community and supports nearby businesses.
- **Economic Vitality** - Businesses and institutions that contribute to the economic development and vitality of the district and City as a whole, providing the community with services, amenities, and job opportunities while supporting the City’s fiscal health.
- **Identity and Design** - Enhance historical and cultural resources, encourage adaptive reuse, and strengthen the district’s identity while allowing creative architectural design.

- **Connected Open Spaces** - An inviting public realm, semi-public, and private open spaces, including landscaped sidewalks, paseos, and urban plazas that reinforce a pedestrian-scaled urban fabric and contribute to a sense of place.
- **Vibrant Public Realm** - Attractive streetscapes and engaging ground floor design that invites residents, employees, students, and visitors to walk the district and participate in public life.

The proposed plan area is organized into subareas to implement the plan’s vision and objectives. During the second study session, the Planning Commission commented on the nomenclature (renaming North Lake as this was confusing with the North Lake Specific Plan) and reducing the number of subareas in the draft plan. Based on feedback, staff recommends consolidating and renaming the subareas along Lake Avenue, resulting in two subareas instead of the four originally proposed for Lake Avenue. Staff also recommends a new nomenclature of “Mid Lake” to replace the former “North Lake” reference. Map 2 shows the revised subareas and nomenclature for the Central District Specific Plan area.

Map 2. Proposed Central District Specific Plan Subareas



Key changes from last draft: Revision to plan boundary to exclude parcels south of California Boulevard, near the Lake Avenue intersection, and two other developed multi-family parcels near Mentor Avenue. Consolidation and renaming subareas along Lake Avenue.

Regulations and Objective Design and Development Standards

The proposed Central District Specific Plan builds upon the current 2004 plan and strengths of the area as a vibrant downtown with a mix of uses, walkable neighborhoods with shopping, entertainment, restaurants, offices, educational institutions, and housing connected by multiple modes of transit. The proposed plan consists of regulatory requirements and form based objective design standards that will shape the future development of this area.

In addition to standards related to scale (i.e., density and FAR), the new form based objective design standards will shape development in a manner that creates a defined public realm and appropriate scale of buildings, create visual interest and reduce building massing through setback and stepback requirements, provide for modulation requirements (façade and roofs), provide for usable and accessible open space with prescribed amenities, and create an active street-level atmosphere through pedestrian-oriented ground floors and well-designed frontages. All applicable development standards are contained in Attachment A, Chapter 6 (Development Standards). The list below provides a summary of key standards provided in the proposed plan:

- Building Heights
- Modulations
- Façade lengths
- Historic adjacency setbacks
- Setbacks
- Window/door transparency
- Density
- Shade structures
- Stepbacks
- Floor Area Ration
- Ground floor frontage
- Open space (private/public)

The proposed plan also introduces objective design standards that relate to the public realm. Such standards include providing detailed dimensions for sidewalks, that vary based on location within the plan area, and organizing the sidewalk into three zones: amenity, walk and building frontage. The amenity zone, area closest to the street, has requirements related to street trees, parkway requirements and allowances for amenities (bus shelters, bicycle parking, paving for pedestrian mobility...etc.). The walk zone is the portion of the sidewalk dedicated to pedestrian travel and will be free of obstruction, with minimum required widths. The building frontage zone is adjacent to private property and allows for outdoor furniture, planters and shade structures. All standards are contained in Attachment A, Chapter 5 (Public Realm).

Currently, the City is in the process of establishing additional form based objective design standards specifically for high density multi-family development projects. Once these standards are established and approved, they will be incorporated into the specific plans.

A summary of the proposed regulations and standards to implement the plan vision is discussed in the following subsections. For additional information on changes between the current plan and the proposed regulations and standards, refer to Attachment D.

Land Uses and Densities (Chapters 4 and 6 of the proposed plan)

The most notable land use change in the current draft of the plan is the allowance of residential uses along Lake Avenue, north of Green Street, in exchange for maintaining the commercial character along the southern portion of Lake Avenue. During both study sessions, the Planning Commission expressed support for shifting residential development opportunities, including adaptive reuse of existing buildings, into the upper portion of Lake Avenue, closer to the Metro Lake Station. Public comments were in support of this shift as well. Based on feedback, the proposed plan allows the greatest residential densities along Lake Avenue, north of Cordova Street, with lower densities south of Cordova Street and east of Mentor Avenue. 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. Shifting residential opportunities closer to the Metro Lake Station would accommodate an additional 600-1,000 units within the proposed plan area. Another notable change compared to the current plan is the permission of various commercial and residential uses on the ground floor to reflect market conditions and the desire to provide a variety of housing options throughout the plan area that was expressed in the community engagement process.

Key changes from last draft: Allocation of residential density along Lake Avenue, north of Green Street, and reduction of density along Colorado Boulevard, east of Mentor Avenue.

Building Height, Upper Story Stepbacks, and Transitional Height (Chapter 6 of the proposed plan)

A few significant changes to the allowable building heights are proposed compared to the current 2004 plan. There are more than ten building height districts in the current plan. The proposed plan includes only six height districts that would implement the plan vision, making it easier to implement. The tallest building height allowances proposed are near the Metro Del Mar and Lake Stations and along Colorado Boulevard at 75 feet, with heights tapering down in areas south of Cordova Street and west of Raymond Avenue at 40 feet.

Along Walnut and Union Streets, the proposed building height is 51 feet instead of the 63 feet height that was discussed during both study sessions to address feedback from the Planning Commission on providing context-sensitive transitions. The proposed plan keeps height-averaging provisions in most of the plan area, allowing additional height over 30% of the building footprint if other portions of the building are lowered to achieve the required average height with the approval of the Design Commission. In a few areas, the allowable average building height increased to encourage more articulation in building massing while maintaining the overall character of the neighborhood. For example, within the Old Pasadena area, the building height increased from 50 to 55 feet using height averaging, but the overall height remained at 40 feet. Along portions of Green Street, upper story stepbacks are required instead of height averaging to preserve tree canopies fronting narrower sidewalks and/or streets, in direct response to comments from the Planning Commission and the public. On other specific corridors, such as Hudson and Mentor Avenue, height transition areas are proposed to contextualize height limits so that new buildings fit in with their neighbors. Other refinements in the proposed plan include maintaining the required

protections for the City Hall view corridor but with more explicit definitions of what is protected.

Key changes from last draft: Building height reduction from 63' to 51' along Walnut and Union Streets.

Ground Floor Frontages and Design Standards (Chapter 6 of the proposed plan)

The proposed plan includes pedestrian-oriented ground floor requirements for mixed-use areas to promote enhanced frontages that engage the public realm with street-oriented entrances, modulated facades, and pedestrian amenities that contribute to the Central District's overall identity, sense of place, and walkability. For example, on streets that are intended to maximize pedestrian activity and reinforce the existing urban commercial character or typology, such as in Old Pasadena, the proposed plan calls for a Type 1A Ground Floor Frontage, which is defined as requiring a minimum of 80% commercial use on the ground floor, and a maximum of 20% residential common space. Design standards, such as building fenestration, façade breaks, projections, and modulation, are also included in the proposed plan to ensure ground floor facades interact with pedestrians and promote accessible and engaging ground floor spaces. On streets where the intended urban character is more residential with larger setbacks, like along Union Street, Type 2B Ground Floor Frontages are established, which allows individual residential units/entrances on the ground floor. Design standards within these areas include treatments such as recessed entryways, raised stoops, patios, and landscaped setbacks to provide transitional spaces between the public sidewalk and the residential units. For new development adjacent to historic resources, the proposed plan includes contextualized objective standards designed to complement and enhance the area's historic character. For example, detailed standards such as site design and building massing, are included in the proposed plan. Design standards are not proposed for residential-only areas, outside the plan's mixed-use neighborhoods, located in the In-Town Residential subdistrict. This area is subject to City of Gardens standards in the Pasadena Municipal Code that promote garden-like courtyard apartments.

Sidewalk Width, Building Setbacks, and Street Trees (Chapters 5 and 6 of the proposed plan)

The proposed plan establishes new minimum sidewalk widths throughout the entire plan area. The current plan only has sidewalk requirements for certain streets. In specific areas, wider sidewalks are proposed to support pedestrian mobility and amenities within the public realm.

The existing street setback requirements are also being revised to enhance the pedestrian experience, aid in creating a transition from the public and private realm and encourage pedestrian mobility. The adopted 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 only certain areas to reinforce an existing historic character and will require a 5-foot minimum setback outside of these historic areas. For example, along Walnut, and Union Streets a minimum 5-

foot setback is proposed, compared to the 0- to 3-foot minimum considered in the draft plan presented during the study sessions.

The increased setback and sidewalk widths create adequate space for parkways and street trees. The proposed plan includes new provisions for landscaped parkways, street trees, tree-well dimensions, and soil requirements to improve tree health and increase the tree canopy. The proposed plan also provides guidance for tree selection which builds on the City's Master Street Tree Plan.

Key change from last draft: Establish a minimum 5' building setback throughout the plan area's mixed-use districts, except in historic districts like Old Pasadena. Introduce new landscaping requirements for buildings that provide a minimum 5' setback.

Open Space and Paseos (Chapter 6 of the proposed plan)

Compared to the current 2004 plan, the proposed plan includes 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 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. In keeping with the type of development seen in this area, projects with more than 80,000 square feet are required to provide a percentage of that area as PAOS. The threshold and percentage requirements were revised to address feedback from the Planning Commission during the second study session. The PAOS is now based on project size, regardless of distance from a Metro station, and the percentage requirement is up to 5%. 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; consistent with the provision provided in the newly adopted South Fair Oaks Specific Plan. Lastly, in response to feedback from the Planning Commission, a majority of the grass and landscaped area that fronts Holly Street and Garfield Avenue, across from City Hall, will be designated as Open Space, up to 45 feet from the sidewalk line to maintain that area as publicly accessible open space, consistent with the OLIN study.

Key change from last draft: For PAOS revision of the percentage requirements, removal of proximity to Metro station as a criterion, and including a provision that allows the review authority to modify standards. Designation of the grass and landscape area fronting Holly Street and Marengo Avenue as Open Space.

Off-Street Parking (Chapter 6 of the proposed plan)

The proposed plan refines the current off-street parking requirements by establishing an appropriate number of parking spaces by land use, size of the development, and location. The proposed plan sets the parking requirements for commercial uses at 2 spaces per 1,000 square feet for office, retail, restaurant, and service uses. Also, no additional parking will be required for these uses occupying less than 5,000 square feet and outdoor dining spaces of less than 500 square feet. Projects within designated historic resources and changes of use in structures built before 1970 will also not be required to provide additional parking. These changes allow for greater flexibility for changes in use, particularly when a new restaurant seeks to occupy an existing tenant space previously used for retail or office and encourage adaptive reuse of existing buildings. The reduced parking requirements reflect the area's access to high-quality transit, including the Metro Lake, Del Mar, and Memorial Park Stations, all of which are walkable within a quarter- and half-mile radius, covering most of the plan area. Shared parking and other standards, like the design of new structures, help to reduce the visual impacts of parking, promote more efficient use of parking spaces, and prioritize pedestrian access and multi-modal activity.

Implementation (Chapter 7 and Appendices of the proposed plan)

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 help guide decision-makers and prioritize the implementation of the plan. These action items reflect feedback received throughout the outreach process and include programs such as identifying opportunities for safety and mobility improvements consistent with the Complete Streets Program and the Pedestrian Plan; conducting a historic resources survey in the plan area to identify and evaluate potential historic resources, including buildings (i.e. Ice House); feasibility studies for streetscape plans for portions along Colorado Boulevard and Lake and Mentor Avenue; and reviewing the street tree palette from the Master Street Tree Plan to consider street trees that better address climate resilience, shading, urban cooling, and carbon sequestration.

Key changes from last draft: New chapter and appendices not previously provided.

CONCLUSION:

The proposed plan for the Central District area would replace the current 2004 plan, refining the plan boundaries, vision, goals, policies, regulations, objective design and development standards, guidelines, 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,



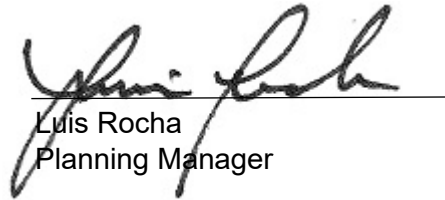
JENNIFER PAIGE, AICP
Acting Director of Planning & Community
Development Department

Prepared by:



Anita Cerna
Principal Planner

Reviewed by:



Luis Rocha
Planning Manager

Attachments: (4)

- Attachment A – Draft Proposed Central District Specific Plan
- Attachment B – Existing 2004 Central District Specific Plan
- Attachment C – Community Engagement and Public Feedback
- Attachment D – Comparison of Current and Proposed Standards

Also Available at the following link: <https://www.ourpasadena.org/CDSP-PC-HR-022223>.