



# Architectural Review Board Report

Architectural Review Board Meeting: May 6, 2024

Agenda Item: 6-C

To: Architectural Review Board  
From: Becky Jones, Associate Planner  
CC: Stephanie Reich, AIA, LEED AP, Design and Historic Preservation Planner  
Subject: 24ARB-0046 & 24ARB-0047 to approve the design, colors, materials, and landscape plans for the construction of an 8-story fully residential building with 145 units at 1801 Santa Monica Boulevard and an 8-story mixed-use building with 143 residential units and 2,700 square feet of commercial space at 1819 Santa Monica Boulevard in the General Commercial (GC) Zoning District.

Address: 1801 Santa Monica Boulevard & 1819 Santa Monica Boulevard  
Applicant: Cypress 1901 SM Developer LLC

## Recommended Action

It is recommended that the Architectural Review Board approve application 24ARB-0046 & 24ARB-0047 based upon the findings and subject to the conditions contained within this report.

## Executive Summary

The two projects are adjacent to each other facing Santa Monica Boulevard and are of a contemporary design with neutral colors and materials that complement each other. The site locations are in the GC Zoning District and part of the Santa Monica Boulevard commercial corridor. Each project utilizes the State Density Bonus to optimize the allowable mass and minimize setbacks with an 8-story building on each parcel. The mass of both buildings is punctuated with recessed private outdoor balconies on each street-facing side. Common open space is provided on the second floor and rooftop of each building with a shared swimming pool on the second floor of 1801 Santa Monica Boulevard. Varying color values in gray, beige, white and silver in conjunction with



materials like plaster, cement, and glass are used to balance the relatively large scale of the two adjacent buildings.

**Project Description**

1801 Santa Monica Boulevard

Eight-story, 117,317 square-foot fully residential project consisting of a total of 145 units, including 15 affordable housing units. Three subterranean levels include 179 vehicular parking spaces.

1819 Santa Monica Boulevard

Eight-story, 116,139 square-foot mixed-use project consisting of 143 residential units, which include 15 affordable housing units. Three subterranean levels provide 173 vehicular parking spaces.

**Background**

23ENT-0174: Administrative Approval (AA) was filed on September 18, 2023, for the proposed 145-unit, residential project. Pursuant to SMMC 9.39.060, a formal ARB review is required prior to approval of the AA.

23ENT-0175: Administrative Approval (AA) was filed on September 18, 2023, for the proposed 143-unit, mixed-use project. Pursuant to SMMC 9.39.060, a formal ARB review is required prior to approval of the AA.

**Project / Site Information**

Zoning District / Design Guidelines:	General Commercial (GC)
Parcel Area (SF):	22,482 SF (1801 Santa Monica Boulevard) 22,475 SF (1819 Santa Monica Boulevard)
Parcel Dimensions:	150' W x 149.88' D (1801 Santa Monica Boulevard) 150' W x 149.83' D (1819 Santa Monica Boulevard)
Existing On-Site Improvements (Year Built):	N/A, structures to be demolished.
Historic Resource Inventory Status	Existing buildings are not on the HRI.
CEQA	Exempt pursuant to Section 15286.
Adjacent Zoning & Use:	North: R2 – Multi-unit residential South: GC – Vacant, Automobile dealership East: GC – Retail West: R2 – Multi-unit residential

**Analysis**

The two adjacent projects share a similar form and massing while the subtle difference in tone and materials distinguishes one building from the other. Livability is enhanced with amenities such as upper-floor courtyards and rooftop decks, and the large scale of the buildings is broken down with large repetitive fenestrations, recessed spaces, and a few irregularly angled forms.



### Building Design/Architectural Concept

The buildings side-by-side create an imposing presence which is broken up with asymmetrical massing, prolific fenestration, and varied materials and textures. Openings for balconies, sunlight, and courtyards create negative space to create some lightness for the design. The ground and upper floors use gold and silver panelized rainscreen veneer that contrasts with the white smooth plaster that sweeps across the middle 2<sup>nd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> floors. Large windows, private balconies, and open space create a sense of livability to maintain a human scale. While the project makes use of density that is beyond what is usually permitted in this neighborhood, the various types of amenities ensure that residents can enjoy a high quality of life without additional burden on surrounding infrastructure.

### Site and Landscape Design

The two project sites are adjacent to each other on the same block and are bordered by 18<sup>th</sup> Street, 19<sup>th</sup> Street, and the commercial thoroughfare of Santa Monica Boulevard. The 18<sup>th</sup> Court alley runs between the two project sites. Both buildings are formed in an asymmetrical u-shape, with the openings of the “u” located on the southeast corner to allow for light to enter the structures. Parking access, loading zones, and refuse areas are located off the 18<sup>th</sup> Court alley for both sites.

Landscaping is minimal on the ground floor of each site as the building footprints stretch out to each property line. Where the building is set back, special paving and/or scoring is provided. Additionally, the 18<sup>th</sup> Court alley is proposed to have special paving. At the ground floor each site will display a unique assortment of decorative drought-tolerant plants. The second floor of each site contains a courtyard in the center of the building, each again with a unique planting plan with the addition of trees and patio seating. A shared swimming pool is located on the second floor at 1801 Santa Monica Boulevard. The rooftop of each building is to be landscaped to provide patio lounging with swan hill fruitless olive trees for shading. Each rooftop also has approximately 1,000 square feet dedicated for a dog park with artificial turf that helps to activate the space for pet owners.

Amenities like outdoor grills, electric firepits, and modern patio furniture are provided on the upper floors to utilize the verticality of such buildings that have large mass in an urban environment. The proposed amenities, common open space, and private open space throughout the buildings vertically and horizontally will enhance the quality of life for the residents.

Mass and Scale

The projects are similar in mass and scale and are side by side along Santa Monica Boulevard. Each building provides strategic areas that are carved out of the volume to enable light, air, and outdoor space, and help to provide some lightness to the design. The form-making strategies are similar and enable the buildings to be complementary yet varied enough to read separately. To enable the allowable density, the buildings are 8-stories-high, and each create a u-shape form where the negative space is used for the allowance of sunlight, air circulation, courtyards, and a shared pool.

The verticality of the design is fully utilized because the buildings span out on each property with no substantial setback. In addition to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor outdoor courtyard and pool, the rooftop deck on each building is another communal amenity that activates the space and connects the residents to nature. The concept of “base-middle-top” is used to break down the buildings horizontally to further reduce the apparent massing. However, by setting back the top two floors, the proportion of the “top”, which includes the railing at the roof, appears too tall and out of proportion with the “middle”. A condition has been included to reduce the size of this expression.

Each façade of its respective building introduces a unique formulation of shapes with recessed balconies, the upper two floors stepped back, and the use of slightly irregular angles on small portions of the façade. The floor-to-ceiling windows and glass railings used throughout the buildings may enhance the monumental appearance of the buildings. However, a condition has been added to require a reconsideration of the size and placement of the fenestration to reduce the proportion and ameliorate the apparent monumentality.

Design, Details and Materials

<b>DESIGN ELEMENTS</b>	<b>PROPOSED EXTERIOR MATERIAL, FINISH AND COLOR</b>
Façade	Cementitious panel (Rainscreen) and cement plaster, smooth, gray/gold/silver/white Plaster, smooth, white
Windows	Aluminum frame (storefront), dark gray Vinyl (residential), dark gray Clear glazing
Doors	Aluminum frame (storefront), dark gray Vinyl (residential), dark gray Clear glazing
Roof	TPO, white
Mechanical Screening	Metal, light gray
Refuse Screening	N/A
Lighting	LED w/ metal, black and dark gray

Canopy/Awning/Trellis	N/A
Railings	Glass, clear glazing Metal picket, gray
Other	N/A

Design and Detailing

The project is composed of high-quality materials that enhance the form-making of both projects. The variations in color and material enable the projects to relate to one another while differentiating them.

The materials are all very smooth, with substantial glazed areas. While the simple use of materials may lend an elegance and simplicity to the design, the buildings appear to lack a sense of residential proportion, and a sense of warmth, shade and shadow that differentiates residential from commercial structures. Conditions have been added to provide suggestions on varied use of exterior wall and railing materials.

Impact on Historic Resources

The subject property is not listed on the City’s Historic Resources Inventory.

**Code Compliance**

This application has been preliminarily reviewed for compliance with the base district’s development standards which address aspects of the plan that could result in significant changes to the project’s design. A complete code-compliance review will not occur until the application is submitted for plan check. Any significant changes to the design subsequent to any ARB approval will require Board approval.

**CEQA Status**

The project is exempt from CEQA pursuant to Section 15268 of the CEQA Guidelines, which state that ministerial approvals are exempt from the requirements of CEQA. ARB’s design review authority is limited to design-related issues in terms of architectural design, proposed materials, colors, mechanical screening, and/or landscape plans. The ARB does not have authority to review or mitigate potential environmental effects. See *McCorkle Eastside Neighborhood Group et al. v. City of Helena et al.* (2018) 31 Cal.App.5th 80, 94-95. Therefore, the project is ministerial and exempt from CEQA.

Additionally, the existing structure(s) proposed for demolition is/are over 40 years old. The Landmarks Commission reviewed the demolition permit application and took no action. Based on the substantial evidence in the record, no further analysis is required to evaluate the potential environmental impact of the demolition on historic resources pursuant to CEQA.

**Housing Accountability Act**

The Housing Accountability Act (Government Code section 65589.5) ("the HAA") is a state law that restricts the City's ability to deny, reduce the density of, or make infeasible any housing development project that complies with objective general plan, zoning, and subdivision standards and criteria (collectively, "Objective Standards"), in effect at the time that the housing development's application is determined to be complete. The HAA

has been effect since 1982 and has undergone several amendments to further reinforce the state legislature's intent to increase the supply of residential housing stock.

In essence, the HAA precludes the City from denying or imposing any conditions upon any housing project (including residential units only or mixed-use projects with at least two-thirds of square footage designated for residential use) unless the City makes findings that: 1) the housing development project would have a specific, adverse impact on public health or safety; and 2) there is no feasible method to mitigate or avoid the impact. Courts and the legislature have made clear that the standard for making the findings is very high and should only be used in very limited circumstances. As previously discussed, in accordance with the provisions of the Zoning Ordinance and the HAA, after determining that the project complies with all the City's Objective Standards, as modified by State Density Bonus Law and that the findings could not be made, the City issued an Administrative Approval for this project.

The HAA does not preclude the Board from exercising its discretion and imposing design conditions as part of its review. However, the ARB is prohibited from imposing any design conditions that have the effect of reducing the number of residential units and/or the residential density of this mixed-use project.

### **Summary**

The two adjacent projects share a similar form and massing while the subtle difference in tone and materials distinguishes one building from the other. Livability is enhanced with amenities like upper-floor courtyards and rooftop decks, and the large scale of the buildings is broken down with large repetitive fenestrations, recessed spaces, and a few irregularly angled forms. As conditioned, the projects appear appropriate for the context along Santa Monica Boulevard.

### **Findings:**

- A. The plan for the proposed buildings or structures is expressive of good taste, good design, and in general contributes to the image of Santa Monica as a place of beauty, creativity, and individuality in that the buildings are composed together with contemporary design features that are used to enhance the projects, especially in ways to relieve their large scale. Neutral tones are used with white plaster, gray cement finishes, and gold or silver rainscreens. Ample fenestration, recessed balconies, and stepped back upper floors permeate across the buildings to create a sense of livability at a grand scale.
- B. The proposed building or structure is not of inferior quality such as to cause the nature of the local neighborhood or environment to materially depreciate in appearance and value in that high quality material such as cementitious panel, smooth stucco and clear glass and as detailed in the application submittal and as presented to the Architectural Review Board will be used.
- C. The proposed design of the building or structure is compatible with developments on land in the general area in that the contemporary design is consistent with new

buildings in the area while not retracting from the older properties of a traditional vernacular.

- D. The proposed development conforms to the effective guidelines and standards adopted pursuant to Chapter 9.55 – *Architectural Review Board*, and all other applicable ordinances insofar as the location and appearance of the buildings and structures are involved. Specifically, the location and appearance of the buildings and structures comply with required findings set forth in Chapter 9.55, as documented by the Architectural Review Board, and as conditioned, the plans will fully comply with all applicable regulations prior to the issuance of a building permit.

### **CONDITIONS:**

1. Prior to submitting for plan check, all details including, but not limited to, windows, doors, siding, and other unique conditions shall be provided to be reviewed and approved by ARB staff to ensure high-quality details for proper implementation.
2. Prior to plan check submittal, modify the materials to provide more texture shade and shadow for a more residential sensibility. For example:
  - i. A wood composite material in strategic locations might provide additional warmth for the design.
  - ii. Materials like corrugated metal, board and batten siding, or other material that has a grain or texture could help provide a more residential proportion.
  - iii. Window screening devices that are performative for sun control could be added to provide shade, shadow, and texture in some locations.
  - iv. Window overhangs or projections may provide shading and additional texture and detail.
3. Prior to plan check submittal, modify the fenestration to reduce some of the floor to ceiling windows and provide additional variation in size and location.
  - i. Provide an operable window in every habitable space with an exterior wall wherever possible.
4. This approval shall expire when the administrative or discretionary entitlements, not including any Subdivision Map approvals, previously granted for the project have lapsed. If no such entitlements have been granted, this approval shall expire 24 months from its effective date, or 30 months if in the Coastal Zone unless appealed.
5. The applicant shall submit a comprehensive sign program for approval by the ARB Board or Staff prior to building permit issuance for the project. The program shall include the signage type, location, total square footage of signage for future tenants, building circulation and building identification.

6. Prior to the issuance of a building permit a hydrozone matrix shall be included in the landscape and irrigation plans that describes for each hydrozone the following: the square footage, percentage of total landscaped area, plant type and plant form, hydrozone basis, hydrozone description, exposure or micro-climate, irrigation method, irrigation devices (including manufacturer, make and model), zone pressure, precipitation rates, zone gallons per minute and controller station numbers.
7. Prior to the issuance of a building permit, the applicant shall demonstrate that the plans comply with all applicable provisions of the Zoning Ordinance. Significant changes to a project's design shall require review and approval of the Architectural Review Board. Minor changes may be approved administratively pursuant to all applicable guidelines.
8. No building permit shall be issued for the project until the developer complies with the requirements of Part 9.30.040 of the Santa Monica Municipal Code, Private Developer Cultural Arts Requirement.

If the developer elects to comply with these requirements by providing on-site public art work or cultural facilities, no final City approval shall be granted until such time as the Director of the Community and Cultural Services Department issues a notice of compliance in accordance with Part 9.30.050

9. No building permit shall be issued for the project until the developer complies with the requirements of Chapter 9.72 of the Santa Monica Municipal Code, the Child Care Linkage Program.
10. Applicant shall defend, indemnify, and hold harmless the City and its boards, commissions, agents, officers, and employees (collectively, "City") from any claims, actions, or proceedings (individually referenced as "Claim" and collectively referenced as "Claims") against the City to attack, set aside, void, or annul, the approval of this Development Review Permit concerning the Applicant's proposed project, or any Claims brought against the City due to the acts or omissions in any way connected to the Applicant's project. City shall promptly notify the applicant of any Claim and shall cooperate fully in the defense. Nothing contained in this paragraph prohibits the City from participating in the defense of any Claims, if both of the following occur:
  - (1) The City bears its own attorney's fees and costs.
  - (2) The City defends the action in good faith.

Applicant shall not be required to pay or perform any settlement unless the settlement is approved by the Applicant.

In the event any such action is commenced to attack, set aside, void or annul all, or any, provisions of any approvals granted for the Project, or is commenced for any other reason against the City for the act or omissions relating to the Applicant's



project, within fourteen (14) days following notice of such action from the City, the Applicant shall file with the City a performance bond or irrevocable letter of credit, or other form of security satisfactory to the City ("the Security") in a form satisfactory to the City, and in the amount of \$100,000 to ensure applicant's performance of its defense, indemnity and hold harmless obligations to City. The Security amount shall not limit the Applicant's obligations to the City hereunder. The failure of the Applicant to provide the Security shall be deemed an express acknowledgment and agreement by the Applicant that the City shall have the authority and right, without consent of the Applicant, to revoke the approvals granted hereunder.

The Architectural Review Board's approval, conditions of approval, or denial of this application may be appealed to the Planning Commission if the appeal is filed with the Zoning Administrator within ten consecutive days following the date of the Architectural Review Board's determination in the manner provided in SMMC9.61.100.

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**Attachments**

- A. Applicant's Submittal Material