

**DATE ISSUED:** December 2, 2004

**REPORT NO. PC-04-165**

**ATTENTION:** **Planning Commission, Agenda of December 9, 2004**

**SUBJECT:** ALPHA STREET INDUSTRIAL VILLAGE PROJECT NO. 4805

**OWNER/**

**APPLICANT:** Virgil Gordon Group (Attachment 11)

**SUMMARY**

**Issue(s)** – Should the Planning Commission recommend that the City Council approve a Public Right-Of-Way Vacation, Public Utility Easement Abandonment, Planned Development Permit and a Site Development Permit to demolish three single-family residences and accessory structures and construct four one-story, industrial shell buildings at 1294 Keeler Court?

**Staff Recommendations:**

1. Recommend to City Council **Certification** of Negative Declaration No. 4805.
2. Recommend to City Council **Approval** of Public-Right-Of-Way Vacation No. 16447, Public Utility Easement Vacation No. 16452, Site Development Permit No. 7888 and Planned Development Permit No. 16446 with conditions (Attachments 4 and 5).

**Community Planning Group Recommendation** - On September 13, 2004, the Southeastern San Diego Planning Committee voted 10-0-0 to recommend approval of the project with no conditions.

**Southeastern San Diego Economic Development Corporation** - The Southeastern Economic Development Corporation submitted a letter dated January 9, 2003 in support of the project (Attachment 10).

**Environmental Review** - The City of San Diego as Lead Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) has prepared and completed a Negative Declaration in accordance with the State of California CEQA Guidelines.

**Fiscal Impact** - None with this action.

**Code Enforcement Impact** - None with this action.

**Housing Impact Statement** - This project proposes to demolish three existing, single family residences and construct four one-story industrial buildings. The site is identified in the Southeastern San Diego Community Plan for Business Park/Office Commercial development. No residential units are proposed in this project.

## **BACKGROUND**

The subject property is a 1.57-acre, irregularly shaped site located at 1294 Keeler Court, on the west side of the terminus of Keeler Court, on the north side of Alpha Street. The property is designated as Business Park/Office Commercial within the Southcrest Neighborhood of the Southeastern San Diego Community Plan and located within the Southcrest Redevelopment Project Area (Attachments 1, 1a and 2). It is zoned I-2 (Industrial) of the Southeastern San Diego Planned District (SESD PDO) and located within the Transit Overlay Zone.

The subject site is bordered along the west by the Southcrest Community Park which is zoned MF-3000 of the SESD PDO. The property to the north is a single-family residence fronting on Keeler Court. Across Keeler Court to the east are other residential structures. These residences are previously conforming as the sites are zoned I-2. On the south side of Alpha Street is the Southcrest Park Plaza Shopping Center, another project of this current applicant, which was permitted by Planned Commercial Development Permit/Southeastern San Diego Planned District Permit No. 93-0557, approved by the City Council in 1995. This permit included a community hall on the north side of Alpha Street, adjacent to the subject property. This building is now the Southcrest Athletic Center (Attachments 9 and 9a). Continuing west along Alpha Street are other commercial developments. The immediate vicinity contains a mix of commercial, residential and industrial developments and zoning designations (Attachments 3 and 3a). The subject property is level with street grades, however, the rear, northwestern portion of the site slopes downward steeply towards the park at a grade difference of approximately 20 feet.

The project requires a Public Right-Of-Way Vacation as a portion of an unnamed, paper alley runs east to west within the center of the site and it is proposed to be vacated for the development (Attachment 7). A Public Utility Easement Vacation located within the southern corner of the site, would also be vacated with the project (Attachment 8). A Planned Development Permit is necessary as the project proposes deviations to the interior and rear yard setbacks and to the offsetting planes requirement (Attachment 13). A Site Development Permit is required for industrial development within the Southeastern Planned District.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Project Description:**

The site is currently improved with two separate developments described as the “south side” and “north side” developments in this report. There are three residences on the south side of the site.

The north side is used to store building materials such as lumber and several wooden sheds. Both developments are currently accessed from two driveways on Keeler Court and contain several improvements which are not consistent with current standards including the previously conforming residential development, lack of landscaped areas, unpaved parking areas, overheight walls on the Alpha Street property line, chain link fencing with barbed wire, and, unscreened storage areas. A fence is also located within City park land. The project proposes the demolition of all of these existing improvements and the site will be brought into conformance with all applicable regulations.

The project proposes the construction of four, industrial shell buildings totaling 14,052 square feet as indicated below (Attachment 6):

Building I	4,070 square feet	five tenant spaces
Building II	4,305 square feet	five tenant spaces
Building III	4,627 square feet	six tenant spaces
Building IV	1,050 square feet	two tenant spaces

#### *Project Components*

A total of 43 parking spaces are proposed to be accessed via two new driveways on Alpha Street. An additional driveway is required on Keeler Court for emergency vehicle access only. The building's main entrances would face the public rights-of-way. Building design elements include elevated roofs with curved facades, roof-top screened mechanical equipment, stucco exterior walls, and metal canopies. The project includes outdoor seating areas for employees within the northwest corner of the site overlooking the park, and, a large turfed area adjacent to Keeler Court.

Prospective tenants have not been identified at this time. All tenant uses would be limited to those uses listed for the I-2 zone of the Southeastern San Diego Planned District Ordinance. The draft permit contains several standard conditions of approval, including the requirement that the development permit control environmental effects, such as air contaminants, noise and toxic materials of future tenants.

Three retaining walls are proposed along the east property line abutting the park, and the north abutting the residential development. On the north property line, new site perimeter walls and fencing include a maximum four and a half-foot high retaining wall with a six-foot high screening wall on top. This fencing is proposed in order to provide a buffer to the adjoining residence at the north. Within the northwest portion of the property, 8,710 cubic yards of fill is proposed with a maximum depth of 21 feet to level the site to make it suitable for the proposed development. On the west property line adjacent to the park, a series of Keystone, modular, plantable walls would be constructed along the newly created slope, reaching a maximum height of 16 feet however the maximum height for any single wall would be nine feet due to required horizontal separations. Cascading vines would be planted to provide visual screening for the park users below and to discourage the placement of graffiti.

The project also includes the construction of a new private storm drain with bio filters installed in all drain inlets. An existing sewer easement will be widened to current city standards.

### **Community Plan Analysis:**

The Southeastern San Diego Community plan includes an Industrial Element which lays out a number of objectives and recommendations. The proposed project meets the overall objective to provide new, high quality office and industrial park development within the community. The Plan states that the creation of industrial centers throughout the community in compact sites will produce the greatest amount of employment potential while locating jobs near residential population bases. Additionally, the proposed project utilized the Community Plan's Urban Design Element Industrial Guidelines in order to reduce any incompatibilities between the commercial/business park development and adjacent development. The proposed project includes varying building placements and setbacks, as well as the incorporation of a pedestrian plaza area and an internal pedestrian walkway with direct connections to the existing sidewalk system.

The Southcrest Neighborhood of the Plan states that this parcel be utilized for a commercial/business park. Further, the plan states that a discretionary permit be required for the site, to ensure any development is high quality, well designed and compatible with adjacent users. The project is consistent with these recommendations and, therefore, the proposed development will not adversely affect the Community Plan.

### **Project-Related Issues:**

#### *Planned Development Permit/Deviations Analysis*

A Planned Development Permit (PDP) has been requested to seek relief from the interior side, rear yard and building modulations requirements as noted below:

- |                   |   |                 |
|-------------------|---|-----------------|
| ➤ Building I      | 10'-0" side yard at the closest point   | 30'-0" required |
| ➤ Building II     | 27'-8" rear yard  | 50'-0" required |
| ➤ Building III    | 41'-0" rear yard  | 50'-0" required |
| ➤ Buildings I -IV | Modulations in all elevations, not in conformance with specific requirements. |                 |

The purpose of the Planned Development Permit regulations is to provide flexibility in the application of development regulations for projects where strict application of the base zone development regulations would restrict design options and result in a less desirable project. The intent of the PDP regulations is to accommodate to the greatest extent possible, an equitable balance of development types, intensities, styles, site constraints, project amenities, public improvements and community and City benefits.

Staff recommends approval of these minor deviations as the site has several constraints that are

not the making of the applicant. These circumstances include its unusual shape and configuration, its topography, its location along the curvature of both Keeler Court and Alpha Street. Additionally, the abutting public park is zoned residential, requiring a 50'-0" rear yard where 30'-0" would normally be required. The site is further constrained by the requirement to widen an easement sewer easement within from 10 to 30 feet in which no permanent buildings can be placed. Additionally, implementation of the project will provide several benefits to the City and the immediate neighborhood.

#### Building I (side yard reduction)

Building I would be placed at the northern portion of the site, adjacent to property that is industrially zoned, but improved with a residential structure. Requiring a 30-foot setback would preclude the full use of the property. However, in recognizing the residential use to the north, a portion of Building I has been articulated so that the front 30 feet of the building observes a 25 foot setback and the remainder observes a ten foot setback along the northern side of the building facing Keeler Court. A retaining wall with a free standing screening wall on top is also proposed along the north interior side yard to help to soften visual impact from the development.

#### Building II and III (rear yard reduction)

Buildings II and III would be placed at the rear of the site which abuts a MF-3000 residentially zoned property. However, the use of the MF-3000 property is the existing Southcrest Community Park. The purpose of the 50 foot setback to residential uses is to mitigate the conflicts involving industrial uses adjacent to residential. This project site is approximately 20 feet higher in elevation than the park site at this location, and, there are no uses of the park that would be compromised by the location of this building.

#### All Buildings (offsetting planes and building modulation)

All four buildings are requesting deviations to the offsetting planes and building modulation requirements. The project meets the intent of this regulation by designing enhanced architectural canopies that extend beyond the face of the buildings creating a covered pedestrian promenade. The purpose of this regulation is to prevent the construction of box-like buildings with no architectural articulation. The applicant has articulated the building design three-dimensionally. Although the footprint of the building lacks the specific offsets or modulations as called for in the zone, the use of the canopy promenades, building transparency, façade material, texture and color variations and wave-like undulations of the parapet, create a three-dimensional structure that is more visually appealing and dynamic than might be achieved with only the implementation of offsetting planes and building modulation.

Staff's analysis is that all of the requested deviations can be supported based on the quality of the project design, development constraints of the site, and project benefits. The subject site is irregular in shape causing site planning to be difficult. The Keeler Court and Alpha Street frontages are located along the curvature of both streets rendering the property non-standard in configuration. The property is higher in elevation than the park site adjacent to the west and there are no uses of the park that would be compromised by the location of proposed buildings.

The proposed project meets the overall objective of the Southeastern San Diego Community Plan by designing new, high quality office and industrial park development within the community, and the specific goal of a Business Park at this location. The proposed project includes varying building placements and setbacks, as well as the incorporation of a pedestrian plaza area and an internal pedestrian walkway with direct connections to the existing sidewalk system. These design elements are in conformance with the design criteria for a planned development permit and are consistent with several recommended design standards and criteria within the Urban Design Element of the Community Plan.

Project implementation will incur several benefits to the City. The project will implement several goals and objectives of the Southeastern San Diego Community Plan and provide a use that was specifically anticipated at this site. The project is consistent with the purpose and intent of the Southeastern San Diego Planned District, which calls for high quality, industrial development, sensitive to and compatible with, the immediate area. The project will facilitate the continued, redevelopment in the area and provide additional employment opportunities to those in the community. The site will be visually enhanced with the new buildings, landscaped areas and paved parking areas.

#### *Public Right Of Way Vacation and Easement Abandonment*

The project proposes to vacate a portion of an existing, 20-foot wide, unnamed alley which runs parallel through the site for approximately 200 feet, and a public utility easement located within the southwest corner of the site. The San Diego Municipal Code states that public easements may be vacated if certain findings can be met. Specifically, that the easements have no current or perspective use, there would be a better utilization of the land by the vacation, and the proposed use of the additional area acquired, would be an improved use of the land.

The alley does not connect to an existing, currently utilized public right-of-way and there is no present or prospective public use for either the alley or the utility easement. The public utility easement does not contain any active public utility facilities. The public will benefit from these vacations as they will result in improved use of the land, a new industrial development, consistent with the zone and specifically anticipated for the site in the Community Plan. The vacation will result in increased tax benefits to the City.

#### **CRITICAL PROJECT FEATURES TO CONSIDER DURING SUBSTANTIAL CONFORMANCE REVIEW**

Land Use: The project site shall remain consistent with the Southeastern San Diego Planned District Ordinance. Any changes from the proposed land use should be reviewed to ensure conformance with the San Diego Municipal Code.

Site Design: The project design should not increase the amount of deviation from the regulations of the development regulations of the underlying zone, unless the Planned Development Permit findings could be made with those additional deviations. The location of the buildings shall be

maintain in place as shown on Exhibit “A”, dated December 9, 2004, in order to maintain a buffer to the adjoining properties to the north and to the east.

Parking/Circulation: Parking spaces shall not be reduced unless there is a reduction in the square footage of any of the buildings. Any changes made to the parking and or conversion for any other use shall be reviewed by the Development Services Department. The parking should not be placed between the front of any building and the street, unless as provided in Exhibit “A.”

Architecture: The project shall be in substantial conformance with the enhanced architectural canopies that extend beyond the face of the building to create a covered pedestrian promenade. The use of building transparency, façade material texture and color variations shall be in substantial conformance with Exhibit “A.”

Landscaping: Landscape material, size, number and location shall be consistent with Exhibit “A.” Any changes to the landscape plan should be reviewed to ensure conformance with the San Diego Municipal Code.

### **CONCLUSION:**

The Alpha Street Industrial Project is consistent with the relevant regulations of the I-2 zone of the Southeastern San Diego Planned District as permitted by Planned Development Permit. The project implements several goals, objectives and recommendations of the Southeastern San Diego Community Plan and the Progress Guide and General Plan as described above. Staff recommends approval of the project.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

1. **Recommend Approval to the City Council, Public Right-Of-Way Vacation No. 16447, Public Utility Easement Abandonment No. 16452, Planned Development Permit No. 16446 and Site Development Permit No. 7888 with modifications.**
2. **Recommend Denial to the City Council, Public Right-Of-Way Vacation No. 16447, Public Utility Easement Abandonment No. 16452, Planned Development Permit No. 16446 and Site Development Permit No. 7888 if the findings required to approve the project cannot be affirmed.**

Respectfully submitted,

---

Marcela Escobar-Eck  
Deputy Director, Project Management Division  
Development Services Department

---

Sandra Teasley  
Development Project Manager  
Development Services Department

MEE/SMT

Attachments:

1. Community Plan Land Use Maps (1 and 1a)
2. Project Location Map
3. Aerial Map of Surrounding Development and Zoning (3 and 3a)
4. Draft Public Right-of-Way Vacation/Easement Abandonment/PDP/SDP Permit with conditions
5. Draft Public Right-of-Way Vacation/Easement Abandonment/PDP/SDP Resolution with Findings
6. Project Plans
7. Alley Vacation Exhibit (B-Sheet 20294-B)
8. Public Utility Easement Vacation Exhibit (B-Sheet 20293-B)
9. Southcrest Park Plaza Site Plan and Permit Excerpt (9 and 9a)
10. Southeastern Economic Development Corporation Recommendation
11. Ownership Disclosure Statement
12. Project Chronology
13. Project Data Sheet