CITY OF VENTURA

PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

Agenda Item: 3	Hearing Date: August 26, 2026
Project No./Case No.:	PROJ-25-0914/MDR-09-25-0065, W-09-25-0012, W-09-25-0013, W-09-25-0014, E-03-26-0015
Applicant/Owner:	Linda Blackbern of RRM Design Group on behalf of Merewether Trust
Staff:	Grant White, Acting Senior Planner
Location:	APN: 073-0-058-030 (Formerly 1042 E. Main St.)
Zoning/Land Use:	T4.1 Main St. Frontage (Urban General 1) /Downtown Specific Plan
Environmental Review:	Categorical Exemption 15332 (Class 32, In-fill Projects)

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Request for Major Design Review to develop a new, 19-unit multi-family residential apartment development with 3 Warrants (Lot width, Tuck-Under Parking, & 60% 3rd story) and 1 Exception (Parking Setback) [Project], on a 12,540-square foot site in the Urban General 1 (T4.1 Main St. Frontage) Zone within the Downtown Specific Plan. The site is commonly identified as Assessor's Parcel Number: 073-0-058-030 and was formerly addressed as 1042 East Main Street.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Planning Commission approve the Major Design Review, Warrants, and Exception, as conditioned.

BACKGROUND

The Project Site is located on the south side of East Main Street between Laurel Street and Ann Street within Downtown Ventura (Figure 1 / Attachment 1). While the Site fronts East Main Street, the primary access to the Site is taken from an alley (Poinsettia Place) to the south. The property is a rectangular, 66-foot-wide interior lot on the 1000 block of East Main Street, bounded by single-family dwellings to the west and north of the site, apartment buildings located to the east and south of the site (see Figure 1 below). The site has been vacant for over 20 years.

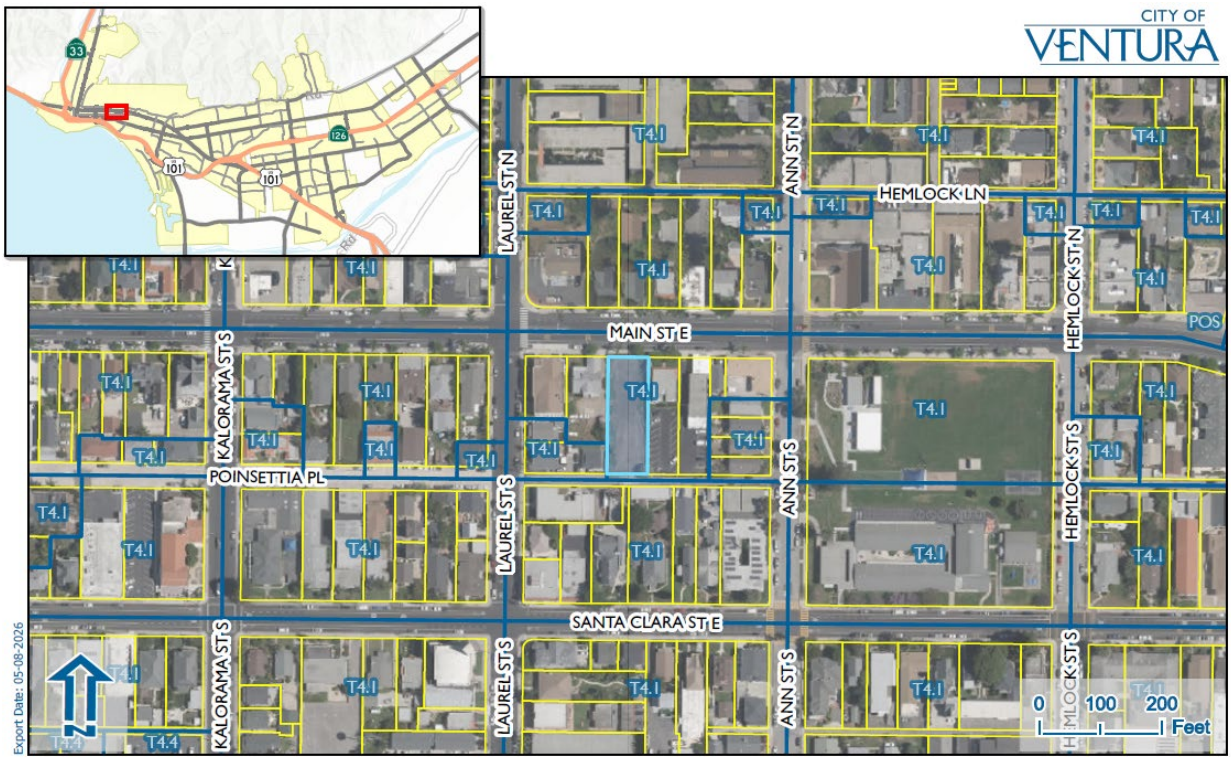

Figure 1. Vicinity Map

The Project Site is located within the Downtown Specific Plan[1] (DTSP) with the Urban General 1 (T4.1 Main Street Frontage) zone. The T4.1 zoning district is described in the DTSP as an area that aims to preserve and restore the historic character of east-side neighborhoods[2]. The Transect zones were established to affect the desired intensity and building scale for any specific area. The zone is the outer transect zone that is scaled primarily toward residential use and neighborhood character and encourages mixed-use and residential infill development. Applicable development standards are outlined in Sec. 2.30.010 Urban Standards in the DTSP[3].

Historic Context

The subject Site is not identified in any City historical survey. The Project Site does not contain an existing or potential landmark, point of interest, or historic resource, and it is not located within an existing, proposed, or potential Historic District.

Legislative Compliance

The Project requires approval of a Major Design Review permit, three Warrants, and one Exception for a new 19-unit multifamily residential development in the T4.1 Main St. Frontage zone of the Downtown Specific Plan. The Municipal Code identifies these as the discretionary approvals necessary because the Project includes new multi-unit residential construction and proposes deviations from applicable Downtown Specific Plan development standards.

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[1] DTSP: www.cityofventura.ca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/9833/Downtown-Specific-Plan-PDF
[2] DTSP: pp.53 www.cityofventura.ca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/9833/Downtown-Specific-Plan-PDF
[3] DTSP pp. 98-126 www.cityofventura.ca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/9833/Downtown-Specific-Plan-PDF

- *Major Design Review.* Major Design Review is required for development adding five or more residential units. Because the Project includes 19 residential units, Major Design Review is required, with Design Review Committee review and recommendation to the decision-maker.

- *Warrants.* Three Warrants are required because the Project does not fully conform to applicable Downtown Specific Plan standards. The requested Warrants would allow: (1) a third story over approximately 60 percent of the building footprint, where only a partial third story up to 20 percent is otherwise permitted; (2) use of the Side Courtyard building type on a 66-foot-wide lot, where 75 feet is otherwise required; and (3) tuck-under, at-grade parking instead of a fully enclosed garage.

- *Exception.* One Exception is required to allow parking within the required five-foot side setback area in order to provide standard-sized parking spaces.

Decision-Making Authority

Pursuant to SBMC Section 24.105.300[4], Major Design Review applications are referred to the Design Review Committee for a recommendation to the applicable decision-making authority. Because the Project includes an Exception under the Downtown Specific Plan, SBMC Section 24.105.300(A)(1) assigns final decision-making authority to the Planning Commission for new development that includes one or more Exceptions.

In addition, SBMC Section 24.105.300(B)(1) provides that when decision-making authority for interrelated project components is shared between the Director and the Planning Commission, the entire application package shall be forwarded to the Planning Commission, which becomes the decision-making authority for all related entitlements. Accordingly, the Planning Commission is the final decision-making authority for the Project.

ANALYSIS

Project Overview

The Project is a new 19-unit residential apartment building in a three-story configuration. The unit mix includes seven studios, nine one-bedroom units, and three two-bedroom units, with three units designated as inclusionary units. The building includes a shared side courtyard, bicycle parking, and on-site tuck-under podium parking (Table 1).

[4] SBMC Sec. 24.105.300: https://sanbuenaventura.municipal.codes/SBMC/24.105.300

Table 1 - Apartment Unit Count				
Level	**Studio**	**1 Bed**	**2 Bed**	**TOTAL**
1st Floor	1	3	0	**4**
2nd Floor	3	4	2	**9**
3rd Floor	3	2	1	**6**
TOTAL	**7**	**9**	**3**	**19**

Figure 2. East Elevation

Figure 3. West Elevation

Figure 4. South Elevation (Rear)

Figure 5. North Elevation (Front)

The structure has a maximum height of 39 feet to the top of the parapet, measured from the lowest point of the building, and a 3,014-square-foot footprint that covers about 25 percent of the 12,540-square-foot lot. The ground floor provides nine podium-covered parking spaces (five with EV receptacles or chargers), one studio unit, three one-bedroom units, a landscaped courtyard, and bicycle parking. The second floor contains three studio units, four one-bedroom units, and two two-bedroom units served by a single-loaded corridor, and the third floor contains three studio units, two one-bedroom units, and one two-bedroom unit with a similar corridor layout. All units have access or views to the side courtyard through vestibules or corridors on their respective floors.

Affordable Housing

The new 19-unit apartment complex will include three affordable units restricted to very-low and low-income households. One unit will be reserved for a very-low income household and two units will be reserved for low-income households, with Table 2 below providing the bedroom count breakdown for these affordable units. As conditioned, the affordable units will not be subject to any fees or restrictions that do not equally apply to the market-rate units. In addition, the affordable units will be restricted for a period of not less than fifty-five (55) years for rental occupancy, and this 55-year affordability covenant will run with the land and be binding on all future owners of the property.

Table 2 – Affordable Unit Bedroom Count Breakdown

Number of Beds	Total Units	Very-Low Income	Low-Income	Market-Rate
Studio	7	0	1	6
1-Bed	9	1	1	7
2-Bed	3	0	0	3
TOTAL	**19**	**1**	**2**	**16**

Design Review Committee Meeting

On July 2, 2025[5], the Design Review Committee (DRC) reviewed the Project conceptually and provided preliminary design direction. In response, the applicant revised the plans to redesign the secondary entrance and front patio, adjust window locations along the corridor and courtyard, add building accessories and night-sky-friendly lighting, increase parapet articulation, refine façade geometry, and upgrade the landscape plan.

On May 6, 2026[6], the DRC reviewed the formal application Project submittal. The Committee considered the full Major Design Review application, including three Warrants and one Exception, and evaluated these changes with particular focus on building massing, frontage and courtyard design, and landscaping in relation to the Downtown Specific Plan standards. Vice Chair Dunbar asked to the applicant to re-evaluate the downspout locations. Conceptually, the plan set remains as presented and no changes have been made to the downspouts. The DRC recommended approval of the Project with a 4-0 vote.

[5] DRC Meeting 07/02/2025: www.cityofventura.ca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/45964/DRC-Meeting-Minutes-7225-DRAFT
[6] DRC Meeting 05/06/2026: https://www.cityofventura.ca.gov/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Agenda/_05062026-3633

Landscaping

The Project's landscape design supports the Downtown Specific Plan's pedestrian-oriented infill objectives by providing planting at the Main Street frontage, within the central courtyard and paseo, along the east property line, and along the Poinsettia Place frontage, as shown in Figure 5 and 6. The plan combines frontage landscaping, accent and specimen trees, vines, shrubs, grasses, and common open-space amenities, with a landscaped paseo and central plaza/courtyard that include enhanced paving, seating, a fire pit, and layered planting to improve open space, privacy, and livability. The predominantly drought-tolerant planting palette is served by a low-water irrigation system with a smart controller, and staff supports the landscape plan because it screens parking and site improvements, softens the building form, enhances the pedestrian environment, and strengthens the project's compatibility as urban residential infill in the Downtown Specific Plan area.

Figure 6. Landscape Plan (Front 50%)

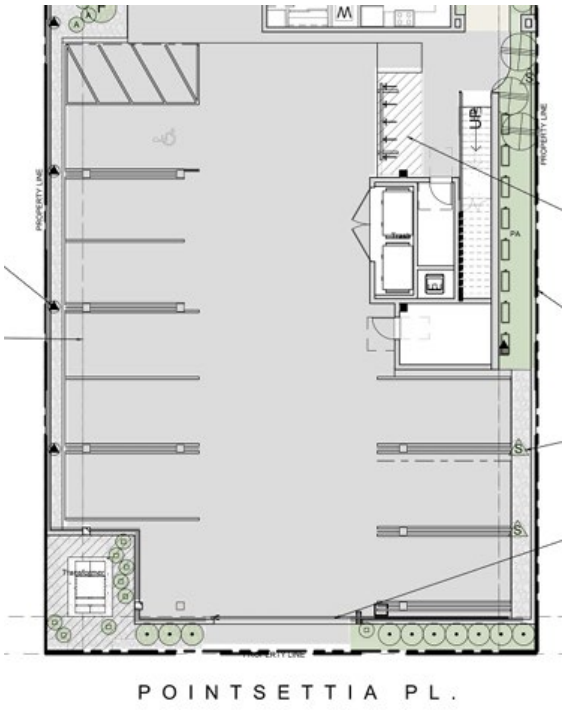

Figure 7. Landscape Plan (Rear 50%)

Downtown Specific Plan Conformance

The Project is subject to the development standards of the Downtown Specific Plan, including the Urban Standards, Building Type Standards, and Frontage Type Standards applicable to the T4.1 Main St. Frontage zone. Overall, the Project is substantially consistent with the Downtown Specific Plan because it introduces a new multifamily residential building on a long-vacant infill parcel, provides housing in the Downtown area, activates the Main Street frontage with a pedestrian-oriented entry sequence, and organizes vehicle access from the alley rather than from the primary street frontage.

The Project does not fully conform to all Downtown Specific Plan standards and therefore includes three Warrant requests and one Exception request as follows:

A. Warrants:
   - Increase in the maximum number of stories from two stories with a partial third (up to 20%) to three stories over approximately 60 percent of the building footprint.
   - Allow the use of an existing 66-foot wide lot for the Side-Court building type (75-feet required).
   - Allow parking in a tuck-under, at-grade configuration instead of a fully enclosed garage.

B. Exception:
   - Allow the location of parking spaces in the required five-foot side setback area in order to provide standards size dimension (9’ x 20’) parking spaces.

The requested departures are limited to design and site-planning standards and do not undermine the overall purpose of the Downtown Specific Plan. The Project still delivers the core planning outcomes sought by the Downtown Specific Plan: infill housing on an underutilized site, a building oriented to Main Street, pedestrian access to individual units and shared open space, improved alley-based circulation, and a development pattern that reinforces downtown residential intensification rather than surface parking or auto-oriented frontage conditions.

Staff support is also strengthened by broader housing policy considerations. The City has recognized in other recent staff analyses that General Plan policy supports production of housing across income levels and maximizing use of land within the City before outward expansion, and Ventura’s current General Plan update emphasizes infill development, additional housing opportunity, and revitalization of underutilized land in areas already served by infrastructure. Specifically, the Project advances the following 2050 General Plan Land Use Policies:

- **Goal Land Use (LU)-1.1**: *Urban Design*. Enhance the appearance of districts, corridors, and gateways (including views from highways) through controls on building placement, design elements, and signage.

- **Goal LU-1.11**: *Environmental Justice and Equity Analysis*. Ensure that land use policies prioritize equity and inclusion. This could involve conducting environmental justice assessments and ensuring that development in historically underserved or disadvantaged communities supports improved health, accessibility, and economic opportunity.
- **Goal LU-3.1**: *Infill First*. Prioritize infill development over the expansion of the City's SOI to accommodate the targeted number and type of housing units described in the Housing Element.
- **Goal LU-4.2**: *Parking Frontages*. Require parking design standards that ensure parking areas do not dominate street frontages and are screened from public views whenever possible.
- **Goal LU-5.1**: *Architectural Styles*. Establish multiple architectural styles for Ventura that reflect the City's heritage, culture, unique location and identity, and existing architectural traditions.
- **Goal LU-5.2**: *Quality Design*. Use simple urban building forms made with permanent materials with high-quality detailing that stands the test of time.
- **Goal LU-15.1**: *Affordable and Workforce Housing*. Actively facilitate adding affordable and workforce housing throughout Ventura.
- **Goal LU-15.5**: *Neighborhood Compatible Uses*. Allow compatible uses like schools, parks, recreation and community centers, art studios, and childcare facilities in residential neighborhoods.
- **Goal LU-15.8**: *10-Minute Neighborhoods*. Strive to create development patterns such that most residents are within a 10 minute or less walk of a variety of neighborhood-serving uses, such as parks, grocery stores, restaurants, places of worship, cafes, dry cleaners, laundromats, banks, hair care, pharmacies, civic uses, job centers, and similar uses.
- **Goal LU-18.1**: *Multifamily Housing*. Encourage multifamily housing development throughout the city and within neighborhoods designated for higher-density residential.

In that context, the Project advances important local and State housing objectives by adding 19 dwelling units, including inclusionary units, on a vacant downtown parcel in a location suitable for urban residential development.

Although the specific departures from the code are addressed in detail through the Warrant and Exception findings (Attachment 2), those deviations do not alter the fundamental conclusion that the Project remains consistent with the overall intent of the Downtown Specific Plan. The Project's requested flexibility allows the site to be developed with meaningful new housing while maintaining an urban, pedestrian-oriented form that is supportable considering the City's housing needs, General Plan direction, and the infill character envisioned for Downtown Ventura.

SUMMARY

Staff supports the Project because it would redevelop a long-vacant site in Downtown Ventura with a new 19-unit multifamily residential building that advances infill housing and reinvestment objectives. The Project includes a pedestrian-oriented Main Street frontage, shared courtyard open space, new landscaping, bicycle storage, and alley-accessed parking, all of which improve the site's appearance and functionality.

The Project is substantially consistent with the T4.1 Main St. Frontage zone and the broader intent of the Downtown Specific Plan. Although the proposal requires three Warrants and one Exception, staff supports those requests because the deviations are limited, the project remains consistent with the Plan's urban design objectives, and the development provides needed housing on an underutilized downtown parcel in furtherance of local housing and General Plan goals.

Noticing

The Project was noticed in accordance with the requirements of SBMC Chapter 24.560, whereby notices were mailed to property owners and tenants within a 300-foot radius of the Project site on July 9, 2026. A project public noticing sign was additionally placed at the Project Site on July 12, 2026, as required by Municipal Code.

CEQA Determination

The Project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under Section 15332 (Class 32, In-Fill Development Projects) of the CEQA Guidelines. The 19-unit multifamily residential development is located within City limits on a site of less than five acres that is substantially surrounded by urban uses, is consistent with the applicable General Plan and Downtown Specific Plan T4.1 Main St. Frontage zoning, and will be served by existing utilities and public services. The Project site has no known value as habitat for special-status species, and the development would not result in significant effects related to traffic, noise, air quality, or water quality. Furthermore, none of the exceptions to the use of categorical exemptions in CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 apply; therefore, no further environmental review is required.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Vicinity Map
Attachment 2 – Resolution
- Exhibit A – Project Plans
- Exhibit B – Development Standards Matrix