

1.	Location:	2121 Harrison Street (southwest corner of Harrison Street/Grand Avenue intersection)
	Proposal:	To construct a cathedral, plaza, parish offices, diocese offices, rectory, mausoleum, meeting facility with food service, café, cathedral bookstore, and approximately 200 below-grade parking spaces
Applicant:		Conversion Management Associates
Owner:		Catholic Cathedral Corporation of the East Bay
Case File Number:		PUD04295, PUDF04296, ER040004
Planning Permits Required:		Amendment to Preliminary Development Plan, and Final Development Plan
General Plan:		Central Business District
Zoning:		C-55 Central Core Commercial Zone/S-4 Design Review Combining Zone/S-17 Downtown Residential Open Space Combining Zone
Environmental Determination:		Environmental review underway. It is anticipated that an Addendum to the Supplemental EIR certified in 1987 for the Kaiser Center Master Plan will be sufficient to provide the required environmental review for the project.
Historic Status:		N/A
Service Delivery District:		I – Downtown/West Oakland/Harbor
City Council District:		3
Status:		Applications submitted and under review
Action to be taken:		Review of project design. No action will be taken
For further information:		Contact case planner Lynn Warner at (510) 238-6168 or by email at lwarner@oaklandnet.com

SUMMARY

The Catholic Cathedral Corporation of the East Bay is proposing to build the Cathedral of Christ the Light Center on the existing surface parking lot located at the southwest corner of the Harrison Street/Grand Avenue intersection. The site is located in Kaiser Center immediately adjacent to the Ordway and 155 Grand buildings, and across Harrison Street from Lake Merritt. There is a mix of commercial, residential, and civic uses in the surrounding area. The current project plans include a cathedral, plaza, parish offices, diocesan offices, rectory, mausoleum, meeting facility with food service, café, cathedral bookstore, and approximately 200 below-grade parking spaces. The site was approved for a 723,000 square foot office project in 2001.

Approval of an amendment to the approved Preliminary Development Plan for the Kaiser Center, and a Final Development Plan for the design are required for the proposed cathedral project. The proposed project was reviewed by the Planning Commission on April 21, 2004, by the Community and Economic Development Committee of the City Council on June 22, 2004, and by the community on April 27 and May 3, 2004. Staff is seeking feedback from the Design Review Committee on the revised project design. Once the environmental review process has been completed, the project will come before the Planning Commission for a decision on the project.

Insert project location map

BACKGROUND

The Preliminary Development Plan (PDP) for the Kaiser Center Master Plan (Master Plan), which was approved in 1982, entailed the phased construction of four high-rise office buildings and several low-rise commercial/office buildings on an approximately 15-acre site. The plan area is bounded by Grand Avenue, Harrison Street, 20th Street, and Webster Street. The Master Plan PDP was revised in 1987, and only two buildings have since been built in the Master Plan area – 111 Grand (Caltrans) and 155 Grand. The Lakepoint Tower office project, which would have been the third building in the Master Plan area, was approved for the project site in 2001 but was never constructed. The approved project was a 28-story building with 723,000 square feet of floor area. A cathedral is now proposed for the site.

PROJECT SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA

The 110,000 square foot project site is a surface parking lot located at the southwest corner of the Harrison Street/Grand Avenue intersection. The site is located in Kaiser Center immediately adjacent to the Ordway and 155 Grand buildings, and across Harrison Street from Lake Merritt. There is a mix of commercial, residential, and civic uses in the surrounding area.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Catholic Cathedral Corporation of the East Bay is proposing to construct the Cathedral of Christ the Light Center on the project site. The current project plans include a cathedral, plaza, parish offices, diocesan offices, rectory, mausoleum, meeting facility with food service, café, cathedral bookstore, and approximately 200 below-grade parking spaces. The cathedral is elliptical in plan and is oriented at an angle to the Harrison/Grand intersection. The entrance to the cathedral is located at the plaza level and faces Lake Merritt. The cathedral design entails a curving wood vault covered in a glass and metal framed “veil” wall rising from a stone and concrete base to approximately 125 feet above the plaza level. The glass “veil” wall would allow the entry of natural light during the day, and would allow the louvered wood vault to glow in the evening from the reflection of the internal light. A curved bell tower is planned in the southeast corner of the site and would have a similar glass and metal framed “veil” wall as the cathedral. The height of the bell tower would be approximately 141 feet above the Harrison Street level. The proposed exterior materials may include aluminum and glass window walls, cast-in-place concrete, aluminum panels, a zinc roof, and limestone.

Two secondary buildings will be located on the perimeter of the site opposite the cathedral. One structure will be a three-story structure above the podium level along 21st Street; and the second will be a one-story structure with penthouse above the podium level along the western edge of the site, adjacent to the existing Ordway and 155 Grand building plazas. These buildings are rectilinear in design and the proposed exterior materials may include cast-in-place concrete, cement plaster, and aluminum-framed windows.

Parking will be provided in two partial levels below grade, with ingress from 21st Street and egress to Grand Avenue. A passenger loading area will be provided on Harrison Street and service vehicle loading access will be provided from Grand Avenue. Parish offices, diocesan offices, a meeting facility, a mausoleum, and a courtyard will be located on the podium level. The

cathedral, a café, cathedral bookstore, additional diocesan offices, and a rectory will be located on or above the plaza level. The plaza will include concrete paving with slate and river rock accents, and landscaped seating areas. The plaza level can be accessed from Harrison Street, Grand Avenue, 21st Street, and the existing Ordway and 155 Grand building plazas.

Since the conceptual project was presented to the Planning Commission, the project sponsor has modified the project description to reduce the size and height of the cathedral, meeting facility, and secondary buildings, as well as to reduce the number of parking spaces. The revised project description includes the following components:

Sanctuary	29,000 square feet	1,500 seats
Cathedral support facilities	7,000 square feet	3 employees
Mausoleum	16,000 square feet	2 employees
Parish offices	9,000 square feet	15 employees
Diocese offices	40,000 square feet	120 employees
Meeting facility	18,000 square feet	5 employees
Retail (café/bookstore)	4,500 square feet	5 employees
Rectory	16,000 square feet	6 residents
Bell tower	500 square feet	
Parking	200 spaces	

Some design elements initially presented have been altered due to cost constraints. In the revised plans, one of the secondary buildings, the fountain and trellis, and the zinc roofing have been deleted. In addition, the size of the reflecting pool has been substantially reduced, and some of the materials have been replaced. The copper or zinc panels have been replaced with aluminum panels, and the architectural concrete proposed for the secondary buildings may be replaced by cement plaster. Certain proposed elements of the project, such as the daily chapel, bell tower, reflecting pool, and limestone at the base of the cathedral wall may be constructed at a later date depending on the availability of funding. Alternate plans have been provided showing the differences between the initial project and possible future conditions. If sufficient funding is available, the future construction phase items would be built within a 15-year period from the date of approval of the project.

GENERAL PLAN ANALYSIS

The General Plan land use designation for the project site is Central Business District. The desired character and uses for this land use designation include a mix of large-scale offices, commercial, urban (high-rise) residential, institutional, open space, cultural, educational, arts, entertainment, service, community facilities, and visitor uses. The proposed uses are consistent with the General Plan land use designation. The project is well within the maximum floor area ratio (FAR) of 20.0 allowed by the General Plan.

ZONING ANALYSIS

The zoning classifications for the project site are C-55/Central Core Commercial Zone, S-4/Design Review Combining Zone, and S-17/Downtown Residential Open Space Combining Zone. The proposed uses are consistent with the zoning classifications. There is no maximum FAR in the C-55 zone for non-residential projects.

PROJECT REVIEW

The project will likely require approval of an amendment to the approved Preliminary Development Plan for the Master Plan due to the change in use, and a Final Development Plan for the design. The proposed project was reviewed by the Planning Commission on April 21, 2004, by the Community and Economic Development Committee of the City Council on June 22, 2004, and by the community on April 27 and May 3, 2004. Once the environmental review process has been completed, the project will come before the Planning Commission for a decision on the project.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

An Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was prepared for the original Master Plan in 1982. Changes to the approved Master Plan necessitated preparation of a Supplemental EIR in 1987 and an EIR Addendum in 2001. The environmental review process is underway and will assess the potential impacts of the proposed project, including issues raised by the community and the Planning Commission such as impacts on glare, parking, and wind. The environmental document will compare the impacts of the proposed project to the previously approved projects on this site.

DESIGN ISSUES

The following design issues have been raised during the preliminary review of the project proposal. The responses from the project design team are provided for each comment.

The building walls along the street edges need to be set or stepped back in order to reduce their apparent mass and height from the sidewalk level - The podium wall is stepped back, using the sloping ADA walk to create a scale transition. In addition, the heights of the building walls directly adjacent to Harrison Street and Grand Avenue have been reduced, vines will be planted along the perimeter of the site, and the plaza above Harrison Street has been designed to provide more openness.

Will the project result in glare from the materials or from lighting? – The materials will not be reflective and the illumination of the structure at night will be a soft glow that is directed outward, not upward.

Can minor rounded forms be incorporated into the rectilinear designs of the secondary buildings? – The secondary buildings housing the offices, rectory, and other uses have been purposefully designed to be a simple rectilinear backdrop for the cathedral in order to emphasize its geometric prominence.

Why aren't street trees proposed along the entire length of the Harrison Street frontage? – Trees cannot be located in front of the proposed pedestrian loading zone, and are not proposed in front of the main steps and the main entry to the conference center on Harrison Street.

Can the prominence of the bell tower at the corner of 21st and Harrison Streets be reduced? - The height has been reduced and is the same as the cathedral. The bell tower is a visual cue to the location of the cathedral for those coming from 21st Street.

The treatment and materials proposed for the plaza paving need to be further detailed and should be compatible with the adjacent plazas at the Ordway and 155 Grand Buildings, which are finished with slate and aggregate with granite, respectively. Cost considerations dictate the use of concrete for the majority of the plaza, however some slate and river rock accents are proposed to complement the finishes on the adjacent building plazas.

Can the steps to Harrison Street be aligned with 22nd Street? – The steps cannot align as the cathedral occupies the space in line with the 22nd Street axis.

Will the frit pattern on the glass be visible from outside and how will it appear? – The pattern will be visible as varying levels of transparency and translucency. It will appear as a subtly patterned surface as distinguished from a clear glass curtain wall.

The steps should curve up from Harrison Street on both sides rather than having an abrupt 90 degree return on one side, in order to provide a more welcoming and grand appearance from the most prominent street frontage - The steps are intended to be compatible with the “edge-defining” set of secondary buildings, and should therefore not be rounded.

How is the cathedral accessed from the parking garage? - The main connections are by elevator and stair to the entry area of the cathedral, and to the lobby of the bookstore/café from which visitors can walk across the plaza.

The plaza design is spare, particularly adjacent to the cathedral. This should be an inviting civic space that includes amenities such as landscaping, seating, and public art. Since the size of the reflecting pool has been reduced can it be located in a more visible part of the site? – The plaza area immediately surrounding the cathedral is intentionally left open due to the need for large outdoor gathering space for certain church functions. The landscape plan is still being refined and may introduce additional design elements. Other elements such as a sculpture garden may be added over time, after the initial construction of the cathedral. The reflecting pool as currently designed is primarily intended to be visible from the chapel. The initial proposal with a larger pool was redesigned due to cost, maintenance, and liability issues.

CONCLUSION

Due to the nature of the proposed uses it is likely that the structures will remain for many years, and it is therefore important that the design is timeless and uses high quality materials. Although it is unfortunate that some design elements of the revised project have been deleted or deferred to the future, it is understandable given the nature of the project and the uncertainty of project funding, which will come from private donations. However, the plaza, the Harrison Street frontage, and connections to the larger city context are critical. Cost considerations aside, this will be a monumental building and attention needs to be focused on the design. Staff generally believes that the design of the proposed project is attractive, and is seeking feedback from the Design Review Committee on the revised project plans.

Respectfully submitted:

CLAUDIA CAPPIO
Development Director

Prepared by:

LYNN WARNER
Planner IV, Major Development Projects

ATTACHMENTS

A. Revised Project Plans