

DOWNTOWN REVIEW BOARD AGENDA

ITEM NO: #

STAFF: MICHAEL TURISK

FILE NO: CPC DP 16-00041 – QUASI-JUDICIAL

PROJECT: FIRE STATION NO. 1

APPLICANT: GENE LEAVINES, HB&A ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING

OWNER: CITY OF COLORADO SPRINGS



PROJECT SUMMARY:

A request for approval of a Form-Based Zone (FBZ) development plan and two associated warrants for Fire Station No. 1 located at 19, 29 and 31 South Weber Street (at the northeast corner of East Colorado Avenue and South Weber Street). The development plan specifically regards an addition to include two fire-fighting apparatus bays and living quarters. The two warrant requests include allowing for approximately 19-feet, 6-inches of side (north) setback (where the maximum standard is 10-feet) along the South Weber Street frontage, and to allow a window glazing percentage of 16 percent along the South Weber Street frontage (where 60 percent is the minimum standard). The subject property is 0.65-acres in size and zoned FBZ-CEN (Form-Based Zone - Central Sector).

1. Applicant's Project Statement: **(FIGURE 1)**
2. Planning & Development Department's Recommendation: **Approval**

BACKGROUND:

1. Site Addresses: 19, 29 and 31 South Weber Street
2. Existing Zoning/Land Use: FBZ-CEN – Form-Based Zone - Central Sector - The site is occupied by two single-tenant buildings that include a fire station, annex and on-site parking.
3. Surrounding Zoning/Land Use:
 - *North*: FBZ-CEN (Form Based Zone - Central Sector)/Office Uses (Rocky Mountain Human Services)
 - *South*: FBZ-CEN (Form Based Zone - Central Sector)/Commercial Uses (Dutch Bros. Coffee drive-thru)
 - *East*: FBZ-CEN (Form Based Zone - Central Sector)/Commercial (Heebee Jeebees tattoo; Springs Flowers)
 - *West*: FBZ-CEN (Form Based Zone - Central Sector)/Office (Conover Professional Building/financial and legal services)
4. Comprehensive Plan/Designated 2020 Land Use: Regional Center
5. Annexation: Town of Colorado Springs
6. Master Plan/Designated Master Plan Land Use: Imagine Downtown Master Plan
7. Subdivision: Town of Colorado Springs (1871)
8. Zoning Enforcement Action: None
9. Physical Characteristics: The site is level and developed with a two-story Civic Building (Fire Station No. 1) built in 1925, a two-story “annex” built in 1970 and on-site parking.

STAKEHOLDER PROCESS AND INVOLVEMENT:

As part of the administrative component of the review, forty-five (45) surrounding property owners within 500-ft. of the subject property were notified of the development plan and associated warrant requests and provided information on how to submit comments. In addition, notification was mailed to the same recipients prior to the Downtown Review Board hearing on June 1. To date, staff has not received any comments and/or inquiries from surrounding property owners and/or stakeholder groups regarding the requests.

ANALYSIS OF REVIEW CRITERIA AND MAJOR ISSUES:

Fire Station No. 1 provides essential emergency response to the City's downtown, occupying a corner lot at the northeast corner of the South Weber Street and the East Colorado Avenue intersection. The fire station is identified as a Civic Use, a permitted use per FBZ standards for the Central Sector, in an area considered as the heart of downtown (or the Core, per the *Imagine Downtown Master Plan Street Hierarchy Map*).

The fire station itself is a two-story brick structure that has served the community since its construction in 1925.

The first floor of the fire station is approximately 3,811 square-feet, the second floor approximately 3,767 square-feet. Although there have been comparatively minor interior remodels over the years (and an addition completed in 1970 known as “the annex”), the configuration and design of the fire station has remained relatively unchanged. The annex mentioned above serves administrative functions, and is 2,296 square-feet on the first floor and 2,235 on the second floor. The square-footage of the two existing structures plus the proposed addition would be 9,335 square-feet on the first floor and 9,093 square-feet on the second floor (for a total building square-footage of 18,428 square-feet) **(FIGURE 2)**.

The proposed and existing building footprints largely comply with the intent of Section 2 of the FBZ Code regarding Civic Buildings located on corner lots, and both the existing building and proposed addition comply with the minimum two-story building height and maximum front setback required for Civic Buildings within the Central Sector.

According to the applicant, Fire Station No. 1 will continue to fulfill an important need within the City Fire Department’s Facility Master Plan Note, too, that the project is consistent with the Fire Department Facilities Master Plan and strategic network plans for Fire Services. However, the existing building is deemed deficient in several essential areas for a modern fire station to efficiently and effectively serve an increasingly vibrant downtown. Specifically, the project intends to remedy the current inadequate dimensions of the fire-fighting apparatus holding bays, as they restrict the types of modern emergency response vehicles that can be utilized. In addition, the currently available living quarters does not adequately accommodate the mixed gender complexion of contemporary fire-fighting teams. Therefore, the submitted FBZ development plan includes a two-story addition (3,228 square-feet on the first floor and 3,091 square-feet on the second floor) just to the north of the existing fire station that would provide two additional apparatus bays, a new entryway and lobby, and additional, modernized dormitories and bathroom facilities on the second floor. The new bays are designed to adequately store and maintain larger, more advanced fire-fighting apparatus and equipment. The adjacent lot addressed as 19 South Weber Street currently provides on-site parking, and would continue in this capacity. The second floor of the existing fire station would be remodeled to include a modernized kitchen, dining area and administrative space.

The existing fire station has two back-in apparatus bays that ingress and egress via South Weber Street; these smaller existing bays will remain active. The bays within the proposed addition are pull-through bays that eliminate the need to stop traffic while apparatus are returned to the bays; this configuration suggests enhanced operational efficiency, effectiveness and safety.

Fire Station No. 1 is noted in Appendix A of the FBZ Code as a *Contributing Historic Structure*, and thus is eligible for State or Federal Historic Designation. However, there is no intent to garner historic designation, at least at this time, but the project under consideration honors the overall architectural and historic character of the existing fire station. The project would not replicate the aesthetic and detail of the original brick, but rather, would employ similar building materials that harmonize with the existing scale, massing, and fenestration pattern.

The space between the new addition and the building to the north will be physically closed with a section of security fencing.

The access drives on East Colorado Avenue will be retained; however, curb cuts will be installed along South Weber Street to accommodate access to and from new apparatus bays. Existing landscape improvements and street trees will remain.

To that point, existing landscape improvements along East Colorado Avenue are relatively new, in good condition, and meet the general standards for the Amenity Zone.

The project also proposes:

- Reconfiguring the east parking lot and access drives. (The project site is exempt from minimum parking standards described in the FBZ Code by virtue of being within the Central Sector). Nonetheless, adequate on-site parking is provided (including one handicapped stall).
- Retaining the existing pedestrian way, landscaping, and amenity zone improvements along East Colorado Avenue;
- Improvements in the pedestrian way and amenity zones along South Weber Street;
- Parking and access surface upgrades;
- A new masonry trash enclosure that will be serviced via the alley;
- New ornamental metal fencing and parking lot lighting; the space between the new addition and the building to the north will be physically closed with a section of steel picket security fencing to match the overall security fencing. (This is preferred in order to preserve visual access necessary to maintain security) (**FIGURE 5**);
- New roofing of the same profile and color. (With the exception of the new roof, the exterior of existing structures will remain unaltered);
- A central tower element at the connection between the existing building and the addition; and
- Pavers and a bicycle rack would be installed at the new entry at South Weber Street.

The existing buildings and proposed addition comply with the minimum two-story building height required by the FBZ Code for Civic Buildings within the Central Sector.

Finally, because the subject property is composed of three lots (The City of Colorado Springs acquired the three lots in three separate conveyances occurring in 1925, 1957, and 1983), and said lots were not re-platted as part of the transfer of ownership, a Waiver of Replat application is currently under administrative review.

Warrant Request 1 – FBZ Standard 2.7.4 (Glazing and Fenestration)

Given the unique access requirements of a fire station and particular concerns over security and maintenance, the Colorado Springs Fire Department requests warrant approval for relief from the 60% glazing standard, per the FBZ Code (**FIGURE 3**). While Fire Station No. 1 meets the requirements of a Storefront Frontage Type, it differs from typical buildings associated with that Frontage Type.

The addition will provide a new building entry at sidewalk grade on the South Weber Street frontage. This configuration provides a “Shopfront” frontage type as defined by the standards of the FBZ Code, a permitted frontage type for Civic Buildings. However, this frontage type is typically associated with retail uses that would typically show substantial window glazing at the sidewalk level. With a stated goal of improving public frontage, the FBZ Code requires that the first floor of all buildings be glazed with transparent glass at the “maximum percentage feasible.” The intent is to use windows to enhance articulation, façade texture and generate visual interest. The building connection between the existing and new apparatus bays is completely glazed; however, the area is comparatively small. View panels are included in the sectional overhead doors serving the new bays, but they do not provide enough glazed area to meet required standards.

As noted above, the degree of glazing provided as calculated at the west facing elevation of the existing buildings and the addition is 16 percent, but the percentage of glazing required for a Shopfront is 60 percent.

While visual interest at sidewalk level is important, in the case of a fire station, visual interest has the potential to cause pedestrians to congregate at the doors to watch as personnel prepare to leave on calls. This creates a safety issue and potentially increases response time. Although the majority of the apparatus bay doors' surface is opaque, the door openings still provide an articulation of fenestration and a textural change in the exterior materials of the building, both stated objectives of the FBZ standards that contribute to visual interest. While Fire Station No. 1 does not meet the 60% glazing requirement, staff suggests that the intent of the FBZ standard is maintained.

While the design of the Fire Station No. 1 meets the requirements of a Storefront Frontage Type, it is atypical of most buildings associated with that Frontage Type. The ground level west elevations of the existing fire station and the proposed addition are almost entirely devoted to apparatus bay doors. Although glass overhead doors are available, the Fire Department considers them to be a security risk and a maintenance concern. Due to the limited ceiling height in the existing bays, coiling overhead doors are currently used and are to be retained with the remodel. The only option for glass doors in the existing bays are side retracting sectional doors which would encroach on the public right-of-way when opening, creating a potential safety risk.

The Colorado Springs Fire Department suggests that the degree of glazing provided is the "maximum feasible percentage" given site constraints and particularly security and maintenance concerns. While the overall intent of the FBZ is to provide visual interest at the sidewalk level, in the case of a fire station, enhanced visual interest potentially would encourage pedestrians to linger and peer into the building, creating potential privacy and safety issues.

Warrant Request 2 – FBZ Standard 2.3.3.4 (Maximum Setback Requirements)

A key consideration regarding emergency response times is the design of interior building circulation and the ability of firefighters to access apparatus bays from any occupied portion of the building in the least amount of time possible. Because apparatus bays are arguably the functional heart of the fire station, the project configuration and design is driven largely by the dimensional requirements for apparatus bays, as well as the need to site said bays as close as possible to the existing fire station. Since the existing fire station's interior space and apparatus bays will continue to be utilized, the design of the new addition is by necessity compact, hence the request to allow a 19-feet, 6-inch side (north) setback in lieu of the 10-foot maximum required by the FBZ Code (**FIGURE 4**).

The Downtown Review Board must find that the request substantially complies with the following five criteria for approval of warrant requests:

1. Are the requested warrants consistent with the intent of the Form-Based Code?

The intent of the Form-Based Code is to increase property owner predictability while also improving the pedestrian character and walkability of the downtown. This project maintains an important historic presence, expanding the facility's functional capabilities with an addition that employs compatible architectural character consistent with the FBZ Code.

The unique operational requirements of a fire station dictate the dimensional configuration of the addition, developed as a design solution that maximizes the ability to provide a high level of service.

2. Are the requested warrants, as well as the project as a whole, consistent with Section 4 – Design Guidelines of the Form-Based Code?

The Site Design of Fire Station No. 1 meets the overall intent of the FBZ Code Design Guidelines. Although bay doors will be opaque, the door openings would provide an articulation of fenestration and textural change on the exterior of the building, both stated objectives of the Code standards that contribute to visual interest. While the proposed project design does not meet the recommended 60% glazing requirement, the overall intent of the FBZ standards is achieved, and the specialized functional requirements of the fire station apparatus bays would not be compromised. The proposed improvements elevate the ability of Fire Station No. 1 to respond to increasing service demands associated with the revitalization of the downtown without reducing the level of service.

3. Are the requested warrants reasonable due to the proposed project's exceptional civic or environmental design?

As alluded to, the configuration of the proposed addition is overwhelmingly driven by the dimensional requirements for new, modern fire-fighting apparatus bays and their relationship with the existing building. Response time to emergency calls is critical to fire station performance; a key component of response is the overall efficiency of interior circulation, and the ability of firefighters to reach bays in the least amount of time possible from any portion of the building.

The requested warrants are considered reasonable given the anticipated overall improved operational efficiency and improved level of service that would be realized.

4. Are the requested warrants consistent with the Imagine Downtown Master Plan?

Located in the Core District, the subject property falls within the boundaries of the Activity Center designation of the Downtown Future Land Use Map. The *Imagine Downtown Master Plan* provides for a strategy that emphasizes the retention and increase of government, civic, institutional, and cultural facilities in the Core. This particular project advances the revitalization of the downtown by continuing to provide emergency services from an established location and with a facility designed to meet the requirements of modern response vehicles. Furthermore, the project would improve quality of life for fire personnel, and would elevate the Fire Department's emergency response capabilities within the Core. If approved, the requested warrants would not render the project incompatible with the Imagine Downtown Master Plan. Therefore, staff considers the requested warrants in overall harmony with the vision for the downtown as described in the Plan.

5. Are the requested warrants consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan?

There is one Comprehensive Plan objective, two policies and one strategy that supports the project as proposed, including:

- Objective LU 3: *Develop A Mix of Interdependent, Compatible, and Mutually Supportive Land Uses* -- This objective speaks to a land use pattern that integrates multiple uses.

- Policy LU 301: *Promote a Mixed Land Use Pattern* -- Promotes development characterized by a mix of mutually supportive and integrated residential and non-residential land uses.
- Policy LU 302: *Encourage Development of Mixed-use Activity Centers* -- Encourages the development of activity centers designed to include a mix of uses that complement and support each other, such as commercial, employment-related, institutional, civic, and residential.
- Strategy LU 201b: *Utilize the Framework for New Infrastructure and Services to Coordinate the City's Strategic Network of Long-range Plans* -- Use the mapped citywide framework for new infrastructure and services to coordinate the development and implementation of the City's Strategic Network of Long-range Plans, including the Long-range Plan for Fire Services.

The proposed addition and remodel are consistent with the goals of the Colorado Springs Comprehensive Plan in that the project preserves an historic presence in the downtown core while providing an addition that reinforces that heritage. The proposed improvements and addition enhance responsiveness of Fire Station No. 1 to respond to anticipated increasing service demands resulting from downtown revitalization efforts while not compromising level of service.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

This request for a FBZ development plan and the two associated warrants described above would help ensure that Fire Station No. 1 can continue to provide the highest level of emergency service to the City's downtown. Therefore, staff has determined that the development plan and associated warrant criteria are met and the applications should be approved.

ITEM NO: CPC DP 16-00041 – FIRE STATION NO. 1 DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND REQUESTED WARRANTS:

Approve the development plan and requested warrants based on the findings that the development plan and warrant criteria found in Sections 5.3 and 5.4, respectively, of the Downtown Colorado Springs Form Based Code are substantially met.