

PROJECT DESCRIPTION – 660 UNIVERSITY AVE, PALO ALTO

Located on a prominent site in Palo Alto, the 660 University project is situated on University Avenue between Middlefield Road and Byron Street. The project proposes a mixed-use 4-story building with two (2) levels of below-grade parking and includes the following: 9,115 square feet of office space on the ground floor; 63 residential units with an entry lobby; and parking to service both uses.

The residential and office entrances are located on University Avenue with recessed alcoves designed to welcome tenants, connected to the sidewalk grade via ramps and stairs. Separate elevators are also provided for each use and are accessible from the below grade parking levels. Natural finishes have been selected for the exterior of the building, including clear glass, board-formed concrete, simulated wood panels and horizontal siding. The residential elevator tower on University Avenue and the stair towers on Middlefield Road and Byron Street are expressed as sculptural forms, further highlighted by extensive landscaping at the edges of the site. Changes in plane, setbacks, projecting balconies, a roof garden with landscaping and trellises contribute to the character and texture of the proposed building.

Three parcels will be combined and two existing office buildings on the site will be demolished in order for this project to proceed. We are estimating that the approximate start date for construction will be 10/01/2024, and the approximate end date for construction will be 09/01/2025.

Context

The project is designed to be a high-quality addition to Palo Alto. Features include changes in plane, the expression of varied heights in the building volumes, material and color variation, recessed windows and projecting balconies with glass railings. In addition to the private balconies, a terrace for residents is proposed at the roof, to provide common open space.

The project has taken steps to respond to the surrounding context of the site. The form of the building steps down toward the adjacent residence located at 524 Middlefield Road and responds to the context of the neighboring single-family use lot through setbacks along the common property line. The shared fence between the neighboring property and the site will be updated based on multiple discussions with the resident of 542 Middlefield Road, and the proposal has been received positively by the neighbor. Trash staging and the vehicular entry to the parking garage are located on Byron Street to avoid further congestion along Middlefield Road. The preservation of a large oak tree, located on an adjacent parcel, is incorporated into the design, and conforms to all recommendations and setbacks prescribed by a city approved arborist. An outdoor deck will also be constructed beneath the existing oak tree without disturbing the existing conditions of the root system. The team for this project successfully designed & constructed a similar project at 250 Bryant in Mountain View (3 stories with two levels of below grade parking) around an existing oak tree and has experience with this type of installation.

The project front yard (Middlefield Rd) has a special 24 ft. setback that is required per the current zoning map. In order to deliver the needed housing to Palo Alto as proposed in this project, the

design seeks to propose a 10 ft. setback. This setback is similar to that provided by the existing office building onsite that is scheduled for removal as a part of this scope -- combined with the 14 ft. sidewalk width, both the existing and proposed buildings are located 24 ft. from the face of the curb on Middlefield Road. For added context, Sheet A1.1-B shows the typical setbacks measured on an aerial overlay of the neighborhood -- currently, no other buildings in the vicinity appear to comply with the 24 ft. setback proposed.

The street side yard setback (University Ave.) requires a 16 ft. setback per zoning, or a 0-20' setback on arterial roadways. The project proposes 6 ft setback is currently proposed, and combined with a 12 ft wide sidewalk, places the building 18 ft. from the face of curb on University Ave. Similarly, the street rear yard (Byron St) proposes a 10 ft setback where 16 ft is required. With the 10ft sidewalk width, the face of the proposed building is 20 ft. from the face of the curb on Byron Street.

The interior side yard requires a 10 ft setback. In order to accommodate the existing oak tree canopy, as well as comply with the required daylight plane adjacent to the single family residence at 534 Middlefield Rd., our building proposes a 19.5 ft. minimum setback, and a 26.5 ft. maximum setback with additional insets. The daylight plane condition is shown in 3/A3.3 in the drawing set.

Open Space – 35% min. required

The proposed design exceeds open space requirements providing 9,406 SF (42%) ground level open space as well as the following: 3,288 SF of private (residential) balcony area; 644 SF of private (residential) terrace area on the second floor (subdivided for the 5 units adjacent); 1,298 SF of private (residential) terrace area on the fourth floor (subdivided for the 3 units adjacent); and 4,672 SF of common use (residential) terrace area on the roof. In total, ~9,902 SF of private balcony & private/common terrace area is provided where only 9,450 SF is required.

While the provided open space total exceeds the minimum requirement, the project proposes 8 units without private balconies. However, the other 55 units are provided with private balconies of a minimum of 60 square feet each. The rooftop terrace will provide a variety of different 'neighborhoods' to allow for diverse gathering spaces from smaller quiet pockets to larger group areas including lounge, dining & BBQ uses. The layout allows the roof terrace to be separated from the interior lot line by the penthouse & HVAC enclosures so that the primary views & sight lines from the terrace are out toward the streets (University primarily and also Byron / Middlefield) and not towards the single-family residence. Seating areas are set away from the perimeter guardrail, allowing the primary circulation to be on the outside of the flexible terrace space, connecting between both egress stairs & the elevator.

FAR – 0.5:1 max, min. 11 units – max 20 units / acre

The proposed office FAR is .4 & the proposed residential FAR is 1.77 (63 units for ~ 0.5 acres where 10 are allowed) for a combined proposed FAR of 2.175. This residential FAR calculation includes the proposed units, stairs, elevators, MEP rooms, & residential lounge to support the residential units, as well as roof top penthouse space to access the residential rooftop terrace. The project seeks to exceed the allowable FAR in order to provide much needed housing within the downtown community.

Jobs/Housing Ratio

The existing combined office area (to be removed) on the subject parcels is 9,216 SF, of which 9,115 SF (~100 SF decrease) is proposed to be replaced within the current project. In addition, the project seeks to provide 63 new housing units (combination of studios, 1-BRs & 2-BRs) to the community.

Parking

With the proposed project being less than a mile from the University Ave. Caltrain station, the project has proposed a robust TDM plan to allow for a parking reduction of 25% overall. In addition, the residential parking is proposed primarily of independent mechanical stackers with pits (2 vehicles per stall) in order to limit the below grade scope to two levels and minimize the amount of below grade excavation and potential dewatering that may be required.

Affordability

The project sponsor is also including the housing affordability component for this project and proposes to distribute the 20% inclusionary requirement across three income levels. Here would be the breakdown of the 13 affordable units (20% of total unit count):

	Income Level	Unit A1	Unit A3	Unit B1	Unit B2	Unit C	Unit E2	Total
Below Market Rate Units (20%, 13 total)	Very – low income	2	1		1			4
	Low Income	1		2		1		4
	Moderate Income		1	3			1	5
	Total							13
Unit Typology	Studio: Unit Type A1-3, B1-4, C, F1 (400 - 500 SF) 1 Bedroom: Unit Type D, E2, F2, G (567 – 655 SF) 2 Bedroom: Unit Type E1 (836 SF)							

Unit Design

A large variety of different unit plans will be provided, ranging from 400 SF to 836 SF. All but eight units will be provided with at least one private balcony of minimum 60 SF. Five units at the second floor (5 studios) will be provided with larger private terraces of at least ~120 SF each. Three units at the fourth floor (2 studios + 1 1BR) provided with larger private terraces of at least ~375 SF each. Each unit will include a full-size ADA compliant bathroom & kitchen with a full-size stacking or side-by-side washer/dryer. Approximately 24% of the units will be 1BR & 2BR, with the remainder provided as studios.

Floor	Unit A1	Unit A2	Unit A3	Unit B1	Unit B2	Unit B3	Unit B4	Unit C	Unit D	Unit E1	Unit E2	Unit F1	Unit F2	Unit G	Total per Floor
Second	3	2	1	2	2	4	2	1	2	1	1	0	0	1	22
Third	1	4	1	2	2	4	2	1	2	1	1	0	0	1	22
Fourth	2	0	1	4	1	2	2	0	1	1	1	2	1	1	19
Total per Unit	6	6	3	8	5	10	6	2	5	3	3	2	1	3	63

RM-20 Zoning compliance

The proposed project requests City Council consideration of the following adjustments under a PC application, to approve 65 new units to the RM-20 district:

1. Increased height: The max building height allowed for RM-20 is 30'. The proposed project seeks to provide a 4-story building with max. 45.5' height to top of roof (terrace), similar in scale to The Hamilton within the same block (between on Hamilton between Byron & Middlefield) as well as Lytton Gardens (opposite block across University).
2. Increased FAR: 0.5 to 2.175 as noted above, including increased density of 65 units from 10/0.5 acre allowed.
3. Reduced parking: 105 stalls are required (37 office + 68 residential including assigned + 2 unassigned ADA). The proposed project seeks to provide a minimum of 79 stalls utilizing a 25% TDM reduction.
4. Open Space: Allowance for a rooftop terrace as common open space for the residential tenants, including the supporting elevator overrun & code required exit stairs for access.

ARB Feedback & Responses

At the previous ARB hearing, the board expressed their interest in seeing a higher level of detail and refinement in the components of the presented design. The feedback has been incorporated into the revised proposal in the following ways:

- Provide details to show that the lift parking will have an independent stacking system.
 - A stacker lift system will be implemented on the P2 level. The lifts utilize pits to allow the lifts to be operated independently so cars can be accessed without assistance.
 - A puzzle lift system will be implemented on the P1 level. The lift configuration allows the lifts to be operated independently so cars can be accessed without assistance.
- Provide high-level site planning options for driveways on both Middlefield and Byron.
 - Upon further feedback and discussion with Planning, the project team has relocated the below-grade garage entry from Middlefield Road to Byron Street. This will prevent further traffic impacts to the University Ave / Middlefield Road intersection.
- Provide flood gate details for below-grade parking.
 - The relocated driveway incorporates a designated area for a flood gate to be manually installed in the event of a flood. At the bottom of the entry ramp, there will be an additional trench drain to catch any rainwater runoff.
- Provide info for how mechanical equipment is allowed below base flood height.
 - Per correspondence with Ludwig Simpao from CPAU, the transformer pad does not need to be elevated above the base flood elevation. It can remain at the same elevation as the sidewalk so long as the required working space is kept level.
 - The CPAU Electric Service Requirements manual does not specify any requirements regarding the installation of pad-mounted equipment in flood hazard areas.
 - CPAU requires that the transformer pad be in a location that allows trucks to back up to within 5' of the pad on a surface that can withstand the truck weight of 24 tons, has an access path that is at least 12' wide, and has a minimum vertical clearance of 14'. Each transformer pad requires 3' of clear and level working space on the non-operable sides, and 8' of clear and level working space on the door sides in front. These requirements are shown in the CPAU Pad Mount Clearance Requirements document.
- Provide cover from weather over the pedestrian entries to the below grade garage.
 - The proposed stairs from the below grade garage to the sidewalk grade are used for fire exit access only.
 - Weather protection is not provided to minimize the visual impact of the exit stairs on the pedestrian experience, and to prevent further encroachment into the setbacks along Byron St. and Middlefield Road.
 - Trench drains will be located at the bottom of each exit stair for rainwater runoff.

- The special setback on Middlefield should be maintained. There is interest in allowing additional height to accommodate this.
 - Upon further study, it was determined that maintaining the 24' Middlefield Road setback would result in the following:
 - The building façade would be reduced along Middlefield Road to maintain the 24' special setback requirement above grade.
 - The raised planters would shift back to match the new building façade, and would encroach into the 24' setback by 10'.
 - The two below-grade parking levels would still extend to the property line.
 - The ground level and below-grade parking levels would reconfigure to accommodate the new garage stair location.
 - A loss of 6 units (2,457 SF) on residential levels 2-4.
 - A loss of 1,290 SF of office space on the ground level.
 - A net loss 3,747 SF, or 7.59% of buildable SF would render the project infeasible from a financing perspective.
- Façade lacks articulation – consider adding vertical hierarchy (base, middle, top), deeper eave elements, recessed windows.
 - The building façade has been refined to include the definition of base, middle, and top, as well as changes in plane, expressed through volumes of varying heights, materials, and color variation. The inclusion of recessed windows of varying depths and projecting balconies with glass railings help to further emphasize these design changes.
- Consider the pedestrian experience.
 - The frontages along Byron Street, University Ave, and Middlefield Road will be replaced with new sidewalks, planter strips, and tree wells.
 - Raised planters with a variety of native plants and trees are located along the edges of the site at ground level, creating a rich landscaped backdrop for pedestrians.
 - Two public art installations, located and expressed at the building exterior at different heights and scales, further enrich the pedestrian experience.
 - The residential and office entries along University Avenue are recessed alcoves designed to welcome tenants and visitors with rich, warm materials.
- Consider user experience in provided open spaces (balconies, deck) and privacy between them.
 - Private balconies are separated by translucent glass partitions. These partitions will be double-layered with a privacy film for additional visual obstruction.
 - The layout of the roof deck was revised to create privacy between the project and the Hamilton, located two lots away on the same block. The occupiable area has been shifted away from the interior lot line via a mechanical enclosure. Penthouses for exit stairs and elevators create secondary visual obstructions, helping to ensure that views and sightlines are directed primarily towards University Avenue.

- Consider overall design parti, and role of the building in the neighborhood – the “downtown gateway” experience and relationship with “Senior Corners.”
 - To emphasize the site’s location, the public art program was expanded to include a second art piece at the elevator tower. This piece is 5’ wide by 30’ tall and adds a visual marker to the site and the University / Middlefield intersection as a gateway into Downtown Palo Alto.
 - The updated exterior materials utilize natural finishes that visually recall those of neighboring high-density projects such as Lytton Gardens.
 - Wood-clad building volumes with trellises at the roof level are located at the corners of University Ave / Middlefield Road and University Ave / Byron Street to celebrate these key intersections.
- Refine the materials – the current proposed materials are not high quality, color scheme is not high enough contrast, materials are “cold”, needs “richness and depth”. Consider incorporating wood and human-scale elements.
 - Updated finishes have been selected for the exterior of the building, which consist of the following:
 - Clear vision glass
 - Board-formed natural concrete
 - Simulated wood façade panels
 - Painted horizontal siding
 - Natural wood slat panels
 - Warm grey painted metal accent panels
 - Warm light grey painted mullions
 - Warm grey painted metal trellis structure with wood slats
 - The finishes provide heightened contrasts in color, texture, richness, and scale.
- Provide a texture sample for all materials, not just colors.
 - Physical sample materials have been provided.
- Confirm unit layouts, considering how window placement affects both the interior and the exterior. Avoid locating major windows with easy viewing from the streets – particularly applies to manager’s unit.
 - Unit layouts have been revised to accommodate the updated façade articulation.
 - Window placement guarantees natural light in all kitchen / bedroom spaces within units, and access to balconies where applicable.
 - The manager’s unit has been removed from the ground level. It will be located on one of the upper residential levels for additional privacy.
- Consider adding interior common spaces.
 - A lounge space is included at the ground level, next to the elevators.
 - On each residential floor, there is a common area with windows located next to the elevators.
- Tree protection is a major priority. Confirm that building the raised deck above existing pavement is the best treatment, and consider clean-up and maintenance related to locating open space below the canopy of the tree. Provide additional detail demonstrating how the tree will be protected.

- The design/construction team has consulted closely with a project arborist to ensure the health and viability of the tree, prioritizing its preservation.
 - Based on arborist feedback, the proposed raised deck design would provide the least amount of impact on the oak tree's existing root system.
 - The office tenants would be responsible for the clean-up and maintenance of the open space below the tree canopy.
 - As of February 2024, an updated arborist report has been issued and the drawing set has been revised to provide information on protection measures in further detail to mitigate tree impacts.
- Add an on-site delivery/drop-off/loading space.
 - A street stall on Byron Street would be used as a loading space for building use, designated via signage.
 - This would service car share drop offs / pickups, on-site delivery, loading, and trash staging / pickup.
- Add street-level bike parking – minimum 50%, though 100% is preferable and more equitable for residents. Consider including space for larger/alternative types of bikes. Provide a bike/ped circulation diagram.
 - The proposed street-level bicycle parking is designed for short-term storage; six (6) stalls have been provided along University Ave.
 - Long-term bicycle parking is located across three separate locations in the below-grade parking garage. The bicycle racks would be accessible through the elevators at ground level and are provided in a secured storage area.
 - The proposed bicycle racks can be customized with standardized accessories to accommodate larger / alternative bicycle types.
 - A bike / pedestrian circulation diagram has been provided in the drawing set on sheets A1.1, A2.P2, and A2.P1.
- Consider adding more shade, trees/landscaping to the roof deck. Consider moving it slightly back from the edge of the building. The mechanical should be placed around the roof deck, not the other way around.
 - The mechanical screen has been centered on the roof to allow maximum efficiency. The roof deck is oriented along University Avenue to provide separation from the interior lot line, as well as the neighboring single-family resident and the Hamilton.
 - Permanent wood slat trellises have been added to the roof deck. Temporary umbrella structures (complying with CBC 3103) will also be available at the roof deck level to provide shade. The temporary structures will be stored away in the event of extreme weather or when not in use.
 - The roof deck has been designed with raised planters of drought-tolerant and native planting, meant to also accommodate stormwater treatment.
 - 14% of the proposed planting at the roof deck grows up to considerable heights. At full maturity, *Cephalanthus occidentalis* reaches ~10 feet in height, and *Ribes sanguineum* reaches ~9 feet in height. These plants are located between the different 'rooms' along University Ave, separating programs to provide privacy as well as shade.