CITY OF GLENDALE, CA

DESIGN REVIEW STAFF REPORT – COMMERCIAL / INDUSTRIAL / MIXED USE

November 9, 2023 *Hearing Date*	**5426 San Fernando Rd. & 753 West California Ave.** *Address*
Design Review Board (DRB) *Review Type*	**5638-018-023 and 5638-018-032** *APN*
PDR-001980-2023 *Case Number*	**Griffith Studio Owner, LCC** *Applicant*
Aileen Babakhani *Case Planner*	**Griffith Studio Owner, LCC** *Owner*

Project Summary

The applicant is proposing to construct approximately 406,318 square feet of building area consists of three commercial buildings (Building 1 to 3) that contain 10 production soundstage studios, three flex spaces, production offices, commissary spaces, and various support spaces and an above-grade six-story parking structure (Building 4) on an approximately 424,453 square foot (9.74 acres) site, located in the IMU zone (Industrial/Commercial Mixed Use). The project provides a total of 533 parking spaces within the proposed parking structure and surface parking lots. The project site is currently occupied with one-story warehouse and commercial buildings (built between 1947 and 1989), totaling approximately 126,450 square feet which are proposed to be demolished.

Building 1 (214,885 S.F.) will be located toward the west side of the site with primary frontage on San Fernando Road. The building will be a six-story main office with supporting spaces and outdoor decks and terraces. Building 2 (97,905 S.F.) will be one-story production stages to accommodate five soundstages and will be located toward the north side, facing Milford Street. Building 3 (93,528 S.F.) will contain five production soundstages and will be located at the south of Building 2, behind Building 1. Building 4 will be a six-level above-grade parking structure, which will be located at the northwest corner of the project site, facing San Fernando Road and Milford Street. The proposed parking structure will provide 479 parking spaces. The project also provides 54 surface parking spaces including four disabled parking spaces and 12 loading spaces. The project meets parking requirements for the proposed development and involves a standards variance, setback variance, and a parking exception request as detailed below in the Active/Pending Permits and Approvals section.

Environmental Review
Pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines (14 Cal Code Regs §15082(a)(1)), the City issued a Notice of Preparation of the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the proposed project on September 9, 2022. A DEIR was circulated for public review and comment from April 3, 2023, through May 3, 2023, for a 30-day period. Public comments were received and responses to each public comment were drafted and incorporated into the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR).

Existing Property/Background
The project site is located on the eastern side of San Fernando Road, southeast of the intersection of Milford Street and San Fernando Road. The project's site is irregularly shaped and is comprised of two parcels addressed as 5426 San Fernando Road and 753 West California Avenue. The site is the largest IMU (Industrial/Commercial Mixed Use) zoned property in the entire city with frontage on three streets with multiple access points and various uses adjacent to the site. The project site is approximately 424,453 square feet (9.74 acres) in area with the longer portion of the site fronting on San Fernando Road to the west, the shorter portion fronting Milford Street to the north, and a smaller portion fronting California Avenue to the south. The project's surrounding area is a mix of commercial, industrial, and residential buildings. The site is currently occupied by existing buildings used for warehouse and entertainment productions and surface parking areas. All existing buildings and surface parking areas on the site (built between 1947 to 1989) are proposed to be demolished. None of the buildings currently on the project site qualify as historic resources; therefore, demolition of these buildings would not result in significant impacts to any historic resources. For more information see Section 4.3 (Cultural Resources) of the Draft EIR (Appendix B) and Section 2.0 of the Final EIR (Responses to Written Comments) in Attachment 5.

The project site has been previously subject to environmental cleanup measures due to soil vapors that exist below the grade. One of the required cleanup measures included the installation and continued maintenance of an underground geosynthetic clay line (GCL) cap, located on the west side of the project site. The GCL cap is approximately six feet below the current ground surface (bgs) and directly beneath a portion of the existing building at the corner of San Fernando Road and Milford Street. The GCL cap was installed to contain soil vapors beneath the property's surface. The GCL cap was required to achieve regulatory oversight closure of the property's environmental cleanup. While there is little threat of vapors escaping while the GCL cap remains, the GCL cap cannot be removed or penetrated. For more information see Section 4.5 (Hazards and Hazardous Materials) of the Draft EIR (Attachment 5). Accordingly, the project is precluded from excavation under and around the areas surrounding Building 1 and Building 4 because such activity would penetrate the GCL cap and any excavation in the area around these buildings is also physically infeasible because it could potentially lead to migration of soil contaminants from the vicinity of the GCL cap and into the surrounding area. This results

in the need to place all proposed buildings at above grade level to avoid excavation. Consequently, Building 1 and Building 4 exceed the height limit of 50 feet.

No indigenous protected trees are located on or within 20 feet of the project site.

Staff Recommendation
Approve with Conditions

Last Date Reviewed / Decision
First time submittal for final review.

Zone: IMU - Ind./Comm'l Mixed Use **Height District:** N/A

Although this design review does not convey final zoning approval, the project has been reviewed for consistency with the applicable Codes and no inconsistencies have been identified with the exception of the requested entitlement below.

Active/Pending Permits and Approvals

Active/Pending Approvals:
On September 27, 2023, the Planning Hearing Officer conducted a public hearing for Variance Case No. PVAR2201935 and Parking Exception Case No. PPPEX2201704 for the following requests:

- A Standard Variance request for exceeding the height limit of 50 feet for Building 1 (89’-6” to the top of the roof parapet) and parking structure Building 4 (69’-0” to the top of the roof parapet).

- A Setback Variance request for not providing the required entrance to the parking structure (Building 4) at the corner cutoff at San Fernando Road and Milford Street intersection.

- Parking Exception request to reduce the required five percent interior landscaping for the parking lots (surface parking areas). The project provides approximately one percent interior landscaping for the project parking lots and eight percent landscaping along the perimeter of the property and throughout the project site; and to allow the project to plant the required trees for the parking areas (lots) along the perimeter of the property and on the parking areas instead of the trees to be dispersed throughout the parking areas; and to eliminate the minimum required five foot landscaped setback on the east side of the parking structure.

The Planning Hearing Officer found that all findings of fact for the above requests could be made, and that the approvals will be granted after the Design Review certifies the Final EIR.

Active/Pending Building Permits:
On September 29, 2023, Building Permit No. BCOMM-009583-2023 was submitted to construct a new motion picture and television studio including 3 buildings, a parking structure, and site improvement. This permit is for the proposed parking structure.

On August 8, 2023, Building Permit No. BCOMM-008257-2023 was submitted to construct a new motion picture and television studio including 3 buildings, a parking structure, and site improvement. This permit is for Building 1 which is a 6-story studio production office.

On May 30, 2023, Building Permit No. BCOMM-006314-2023 was submitted to construct a new motion picture and television studio including 3 buildings, a parking structure, and site improvement. This permit is for Building 2 which is a one-story building with five (5) soundstages and support spaces.

On May 30, 2023, Building Permit No. BCOMM-006318-2023 was submitted for construction of a new motion picture and television studio including 3 buildings, a parking structure, and site improvement. This permit is for Building 3 which is a one-story building with five (5) soundstages and support spaces.

On May 26, 2023, Building Permit No. BCOMM-006270-2023 to construct a new motion picture and television studio including 3 buildings, a parking structure, and site improvement. This permit is for the proposed site improvements.

Site Slope and Grading
None proposed.

DESIGN ANALYSIS

Site Planning
Are the following items satisfactory and compatible with the project site and surrounding area?

Building Location
☒ **yes** ☐ **n/a** ☐ **no**

If "no" select from below and explain:
☐ Located at or near front property line

☐ Conforms to prevailing setbacks on the street
☐ Maintains appropriate sidewalk width

Usable Open Space
☒ **yes** ☐ **n/a** ☐ **no**

If "no" select from below and explain:
☐ Incorporates outdoor pedestrian space
☐ Integrated with design and overall context
☐ Appropriate relationship with adjoining properties

Access and Parking
☒ **yes** ☐ **n/a** ☐ **no**

If "no" select from below and explain:
☐ Parking location is appropriate to the site and its neighborhood context
☐ Appropriate pedestrian and vehicle access points
☐ Appropriate service and loading locations
☐ Landscape screening for street-facing parking
☐ Techniques employed to reduce stormwater runoff
☐ Decorative or colored paving to delineate pedestrian areas

Landscape Design
☒ **yes** ☐ **n/a** ☐ **no**

If "no" select from below and explain:
☐ Complementary to building design
☐ Appropriately sized and located

Walls, Fences, and Retaining Walls
☒ **yes** ☐ **n/a** ☐ **no**

If "no" select from below and explain:
☐ Minimize use whenever possible
☐ Use decorative material to complement building and/or landscape design
☐ Provide landscaping to minimize visual impact

Screening
☒ **yes** ☐ **n/a** ☐ **no**

If "no" select from below and explain:
☐ Mechanical equipment appropriately screened
☐ Trash bins appropriately located and screened

Determination of Compatibility: Site Planning

The proposed site planning is appropriate, as modified by any proposed conditions, to the site and its surroundings for the following reasons:

- The project's site planning is appropriate to the site and its primarily industrial, commercial, and residential neighboring properties and meets the City's Design Guidelines for the Suburban Corridor projects as the proposed buildings are located close to the streets with on-site surface parking areas located behind the buildings.
- The proposed development provides 17'-0" setback along San Fernando Road in order to accommodate the existing high voltage power poles and power lines along the street and provides significant setbacks from the adjacent residential neighborhood on the east and southeast side of the site. The development distances 48'-9" from the east interior property line and 62'-6" from the south property line. This helps the development to be compatible with the surrounding residential buildings, considering shade/shadow effects, light, air and ventilation, scenic vistas, and the intensity of development.
- New vehicular access to the site will be provided from two secured gates from Milford Street (north side of the site) and one gate from California Avenue (south side of the site), away from street intersections to minimize conflict with traffic. The project also provides a pedestrian entry to Building 1 (office building) with access through a U shaped rideshare entry and exit off San Fernando Road (west side of the site). All proposed vehicular gates allow vehicular circulation to the proposed parking structure and on-site surface parking lots. The westerly gate on Milford Street will provide direct access to the parking structure through a driveway located at the east side of the parking structure. As encouraged by the Design Guidelines, the project's on-site parking areas are either completely screened from view by the buildings or distanced significantly from San Fernando Road and Milford Street.
- The proposed development will not alter the existing sidewalks and street trees along three street frontages. New street trees will be planted along Milford Street and San Fernando Road to the satisfaction of the Public Works Department/Urban Forestry.
- The project's landscaping is complementary to the building design and includes drought tolerant plants and trees which are proposed throughout the parking lots and

along the site perimeter, adjacent to the residential zones. To enhance pedestrian experience, the project is also proposing generous landscaped areas along San Fernando Road and at the base of the building (parking structure) along Milford Street. Parking Exception Case No. PPPEX2201704 addresses the project's deficiency in the required interior landscaping for the parking lots, trees dispersal requirements throughout the parking lots, and the elimination of the minimum required five-foot landscaped setback on the east side of the parking structure.

- The project proposes a six-level parking structure at the corner of the site. It also provides a landscaped open space with seating area for the public use at the northwest corner of the building (corner of San Fernando Road and Milford). However, it does not provide the code required entrance to the building from the corner cutoff. Variance Case No. PVAR2201935 addresses the details and justifications for the variance request.
- New CMU walls with plaster finish and the overall height of eight feet are proposed along the easterly and southerly property lines, adjacent to the residential neighborhood. Landscaping is proposed along the walls to soften the appearance of the walls and to minimize visual impact. The project is proposing iron fences and gates at the entry area of Building 1, along San Fernando Road. Series of planters and landscaping along the fence and gates are complementary to the design and help minimize the visual impact.
- The rooftop mechanical equipment for all buildings will be appropriately screened from view.
- The trash collection areas and required transformer enclosures are appropriately sited on the site.

Massing and Scale

Are the following items satisfactory and compatible with the project site and surrounding area?

Building Relates to its Surrounding Context

☒ **yes** ☐ **n/a** ☐ **no**

If "no" select from below and explain:

☐ Appropriate proportions and transitions

☐ Articulation, solid/void balance, and open space relate to predominant pattern

Building Relates to Existing Topography

☐ **yes** ☒ **n/a** ☐ **no**

If "no" select from below and explain:

☐ Form and profile follow topography
☐ Alteration of existing land form minimized
☐ Retaining walls terrace with slope to minimize height

Consistent Architectural Concept
☒ **yes** ☐ **n/a** ☐ **no**

If "no" select from below and explain:
☐ Concept governs massing and height

Scale and Proportion
☒ **yes** ☐ **n/a** ☐ **no**

If "no" select from below and explain:
☐ Articulation avoids overbearing forms
☐ Appropriate solid/void relationships
☐ Entry and major features well located

Massing
☒ **yes** ☐ **n/a** ☐ **no**

If "no" select from below and explain:
☐ Larger masses broken into separate volumes
☐ Long, unbroken street walls avoided
☐ Visual impact of larger building minimized

Determination of Compatibility: Mass and Scale

The proposed massing and scale are appropriate, as modified by any proposed conditions, to the site and its surroundings for the following reasons:

- The mass and scale of the proposed project are appropriate and relate to the existing context and provide effective transitions within the existing industrial, commercial, and multi-story residential buildings adjacent to the project site because the taller portion of the proposed development is located away from the existing one- to three-story residential buildings. The proposed development is larger in size (406,318 SF) than

existing neighboring structures and is designed as a series of separate buildings with variations in building heights, stepbacks, materials, and colors as encouraged by the City's Design Guidelines. The project is proposing four detached buildings (Building 1 to 4). Building 1 which is a six-story production office with supporting spaces, is the tallest building and faces San Fernando Road and represents appropriate proportions with multiple forms. The proposed landscape along the lower levels of the building, stepbacks, and the use of glass surfaces break up the massing in an effective way and provide human scale forms as encouraged by the Design Guidelines. The proposed terraces on the upper floors of Building 1 provide visual interest and also help break up the building's massing. Building 4 is a six-level above-grade parking structure and will be located at the northwest corner of the site, to the north side of Building 1. The proposed landscape planters at the base of the parking structure will help reduce the building's sense of mass.

- Building 1 with the overall height of 89'-6" and Building 4 (parking structure) with the overall height of 67'-5" exceed the height limit of 50 feet. Building 2 and 3 will have an overall height of 50 feet. While the proposed buildings are larger than the existing buildings, the development will add to the visual interest and architectural elements that are appropriate and complement the existing commercial and industrial buildings along San Fernando Road. Variance Case No. PVAR2201935 addresses the exceeded height limit.
- Building 2 and Building 3 with the overall height of 50 feet are largely unarticulated and designed to accommodate soundstage production spaces and consequently do not propose broken forms so they can meet the operational needs and industry standards of soundstage production facilities. Building 3 will be partially visible from the street (San Fernando Road) and Building 2 faces Milford Street (on the north side of the site). The proposed landscape and trees on the existing parkway along Milford frontage help soften the building edge along the street and help the transition of the proposed scale with the surrounding context.
- The building's primary pedestrian entrance is well integrated and will be accessed from San Fernando Road (west side of the site) through a U-shaped driveway, designed for pick-up and drop-off of the employees and users of the campus.

Design and Detailing

Are the following items satisfactory and compatible with the project site and surrounding area?

Overall Design and Detailing

☒ **yes** ☐ **n/a** ☐ **no**

If "no" select from below and explain:

☐ Consistent architectural concept

☐ Proportions appropriate to project and surrounding neighborhood
☐ Appropriate solid/void relationships

Entryway
☒ **yes** ☐ **n/a** ☐ **no**

If "no" select from below and explain:
☐ Well integrated into design
☐ Location promotes pedestrian activity
☐ Design provides appropriate focal point

Storefronts and Windows
☒ **yes** ☐ **n/a** ☐ **no**

If "no" select from below and explain:
☐ Maximize transparency at ground floor
☐ 12-15' floor-to-floor height at ground-floor is encouraged
☐ Coordinate design with overall style of building
☐ Use durable materials for windows, such as aluminum or steel
☐ Locate security gates/grilles inside commercial spaces, preferably set back from storefront

Awnings and Canopies
☒ **yes** ☐ **n/a** ☐ **no**

If "no" select from below and explain:
☐ Integrate awnings and canopies into overall building design
☐ Avoid long treatments spanning multiple openings
☐ Back-lit awnings are not allowed

Lighting
☒ **yes** ☐ **n/a** ☐ **no**

If "no" select from below and explain:
☐ Light fixtures are appropriate to the building design

☐ Avoid over-lit facades; consider ambient light conditions when developing lighting scheme
☐ Utilize shielded fixtures to avoid light spillover onto adjacent properties

Finish Materials and Color
☐ **yes** ☐ **n/a** ☒ **no**

If "no" select from below and explain:
☐ Textures and colors reinforce design
☒ High-quality, durable materials used, especially facing the street
☐ Materials appropriately enhance articulation and façade hierarchies
☐ Wrap corners and terminate cladding appropriately
☐ Cladding is well detailed, especially at junctions between materials
☐ Foam trim, finished on site, is prohibited

A condition of approval is recommended to utilize higher quality materials than EIFS for Building 1 and provide variety in materials and colors especially for the façade facing San Fernando Road.

Paving Materials
☒ **yes** ☐ **n/a** ☐ **no**

If "no" select from below and explain:
☐ Decorative material at entries/driveways
☐ Permeable paving when possible
☐ Material and color related to design

Roof Forms
☒ **yes** ☐ **n/a** ☐ **no**

If "no" select from below and explain:
☐ Configure roofline to provide visual interest and deemphasize mass
☐ Roof forms are consistent with overall design
☐ Continue roofs and parapets around building or terminate in logical manner

Determination of Compatibility: Design and Detailing

The proposed design and detailing are appropriate, as modified by any proposed conditions, to the site and its surroundings for the following reasons:

- The proposed architectural style and details are appropriate to the site and its surroundings. Overall, the design and detailing reinforce the proposed Modern architectural style and enhance the edge of the suburban corridor along San Fernando Road. For Building 1 (office building), the project proposes smooth finish EIFS in two colors, partial decorative metal cladding, metal railings and gates, metal canopies, glass surfaces, and aluminum doors and windows. A condition of approval is recommended to utilize higher quality materials than EIFS and provide variety in materials and colors especially for the façade facing San Fernando Road.
- For Building 2 and 3 (soundstages), the project proposes painted CMU walls at the building base and tilt-up concrete panels above. For Building 4 (parking structure), the concrete walls are partially clad with a metal panel cladding system to screen and soften the walls.
- The location of the primary entryway to the project's office building along San Fernando Road is recessed to create visual interest that provides a sense of arrival to the structure. The entryway is marked with a change in materials and colors to indicate the entry point at the passenger pick-up and drop-off area.
- To enhance the pedestrian experience, the project is proposing top cast concrete paving material for the visitors' driveway, facing San Fernando Road. The project proposes asphalt and un-permeable surface material for the internal parking lots, compatible for use by heavy vehicles and trucks.
- The project's design indicates locations for accessory wall signs, directional signs, and accessory ground signs. The signs are appropriately scaled for the size of the buildings.
- The development does not propose any exterior light fixtures on the walls of Building 1 and the light fixtures for the exterior trellis are proposed to be mounted underside. Building 2 and 3 will have exterior light fixtures mounted on the walls except for the walls that are facing the public right of way.
- The project is subject to Urban Art requirement and is required to include on-site public art, equal to 2% of project value, subject to review by the design review authority, following review and recommendation by the Arts and Culture Commission or any other body designated by the City Council. As an alternative to the urban art plan requirements, the applicant may pay an amount equivalent to one (1) percent of the value of the project, as determined by the building official, into the urban art fund. The applicant has indicated an intention to pay the in-lieu fee.

- The windows and doors are compatible with the proposed architectural style and the overall design. The windows for Building 1 will be fixed, aluminum with deep trim (EIFS) around windows to provide depth and shadow. The soundstages (Building 2 and 3) do not feature any windows.
- The proposed buildings feature flat roofs with roof parapets, which are appropriate to the context and reinforce the proposed architectural design concept.

Recommendation / Draft Record of Decision

Based on the above analysis, staff recommends **Approval with Conditions.** This determination is based on the implementation of the following recommended conditions:

Conditions

1. Utilize higher quality materials than EIFS for Building 1 and provide variety in materials and colors especially for the façade facing San Fernando Road.

Attachments

1. Resolution Certifying Final EIR
2. Plans
3. Photos of Existing Property
4. Location Map
5. Environmental – Draft EIR and Final EIR: https://www.glendaleca.gov/government/departments/community-development/planning/current-projects/environmental-review
6. Architecture Statement