



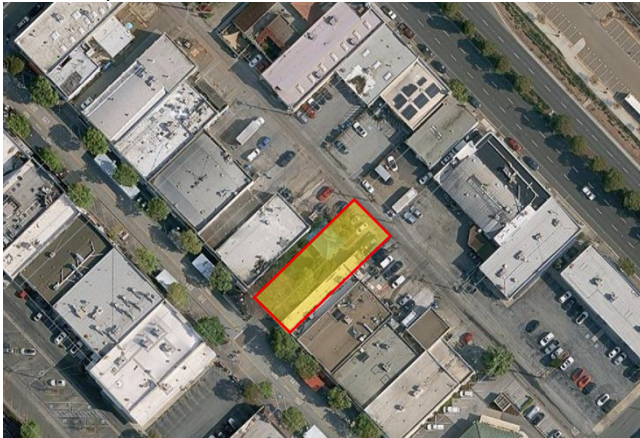
**Planning and Transportation Commission
STAFF REPORT**

MEETING DATE: October 6, 2025

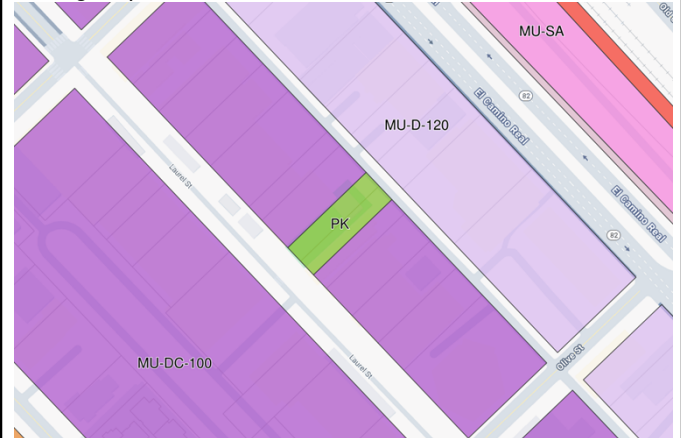
ITEM TITLE: Harrington Park (APNs 050-154-160 and 050-154-170) - Public Hearing to Consider Approving the Design Review, Protected Tree Removal Permit, and Variance to Allow a Building Within the Normally Required Interior Side and Rear Setbacks.

DATE PREPARED	APPLICATION NUMBER	APPLICANT	PERMIT(S)
October 1, 2025	PLAN2025-00075	City of San Carlos	Design Review, Variance, Protected Tree Removal Permit
PREPARED BY Rendell Bustos, Senior Planner, 650-802-4255, rbustos@cityofsancarlos.org			
SUMMARY OF REQUEST Application for Design Review and a Protected Tree Removal Permit for the redevelopment of Frank D. Harrington Park, and a Variance to allow a 679 square-foot multi-purpose building within the interior side and rear setbacks.			
ADDRESS	APN	LOT DESCRIPTION	GENERAL PLAN
759 Laurel Street	050-154-160, 050-154-170	7,250 square-feet	Park
LOCATION		PREVIOUS USE/ CURRENT USE	ZONING DISTRICT
East side of the 700 block of Laurel Street		Park and Recreation Facilities, Public (Frank D. Harrington Park)	Park (PK)
SURROUNDING LAND USES		SURROUNDING ZONING	
North/South/East/West: Commercial		North: Mixed-Use Downtown Core (MU-DC-100) South: Mixed-Use Downtown Core (MU-DC-100) East: Mixed-Use Downtown (MU-DC-120) West: Mixed-Use Downtown Core (MU-DC-100)	

Aerial Map



Zoning Map



ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

The project has been determined to be exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) per sections 15303 and 15304. These sections exempt structures less than 2,500 square-feet in floor area and new landscaping respectively.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Planning and Transportation Commission approve the request for Design Review for the redevelopment of Frank D. Harrington Park, Protected Tree Removal Permit for the removal of ten protected trees, and Variance to allow a 679 square-foot multi-purpose building within the interior side and rear setbacks at 759 Laurel Street (APN: 050-154-160 and 050-154-170) consistent with the adopted Downtown Streetscape Master Plan and the Final Design for Harrington Park as approved by the City Council on June 9, 2025 under Resolution No. 2025-054.

BACKGROUND:

In 2022, the City began a planning process for the Downtown Specific Plan aimed at enhancing the downtown core. A key component of the Downtown Specific Plan is the [Downtown Streetscape Master Plan](#), which was adopted by the City Council on April 28, 2025. The Downtown Streetscape Master Plan outlines a series of improvements along several downtown streets that focus on placemaking, pedestrians, and sustainability. The Downtown Streetscape Master Plan also outlines key features of the 700 block of Laurel Street and Frank D. Harrington Park (Harrington Park) to operate as a pedestrian promenade and central community gathering point.

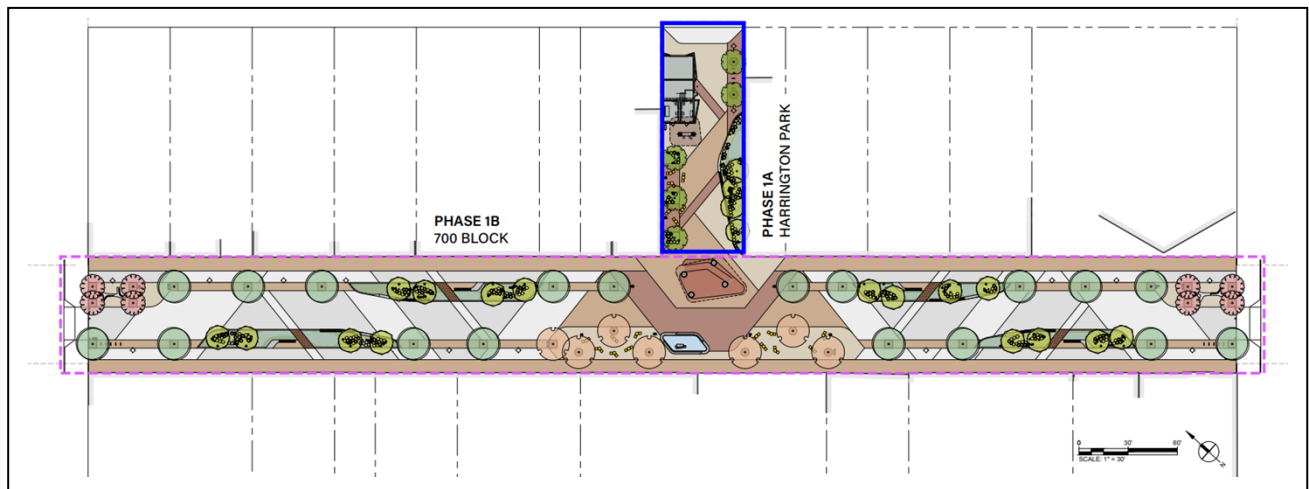
During the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan process, the City Council expressed an interest to begin implementation and construction within the downtown. Given their prominence, the 700 block of Laurel Street and Harrington Park were identified as Phase 1 implementation projects. Throughout the several City Council study sessions aimed at refining the designs for Phase 1, staff and the consultant team (led by WRT) have divided the Phase 1 project into two subphases: Phase 1A consisting of the renovation of Harrington Park, and Phase 1B consisting of the entire pedestrianized zone along the 700 block of Laurel Street. The extent of each phase is mapped in Figure 1 below.

The project for consideration at this meeting is limited to improvements in Phase 1A (Harrington Park). At this public hearing, staff is requesting the Planning and Transportation Commission approve the necessary planning entitlements for the redevelopment of Harrington Park. These entitlements include:

- **Design Review:** To evaluate and approve the overall design of Harrington Park including the building's appearance, materials, and color palette.
- **Protected Tree Removal Permit:** To allow the removal of ten protected trees to accommodate the proposed construction.
- **Variance:** To permit construction within the required setback areas.

Approval of these entitlements enable the project team to proceed with final plans, specifications, and estimates for Phase 1A (Harrington Park). The City Council will be considering approval of these items tentatively on November 10, 2025.

Figure 1. Phase 1: Harrington Park and 700 Block of Laurel Street



Site Description

Frank D. Harrington Park (Harrington Park) is zoned Park (PK) and is located near the center of the 700 block of Laurel Street. The park's combined site area is 7,250 square feet and currently includes benches, picnic and chess tables, landscaped areas, mature shade trees, a performance stage, a shade structure, the "Balancing Act" sculpture (commonly referred to as "Blue Man"), and a series of memorial tree plaques and donor bricks. Harrington Park currently serves as both a respite for downtown patrons as well as a flexible event space for nearby activities (including annual Goblin Walk, Art and Wine Faire, Night of Holiday Lights, and Harringtontunes events).

Harrington Park - Facing East



Harrington Park - Facing West



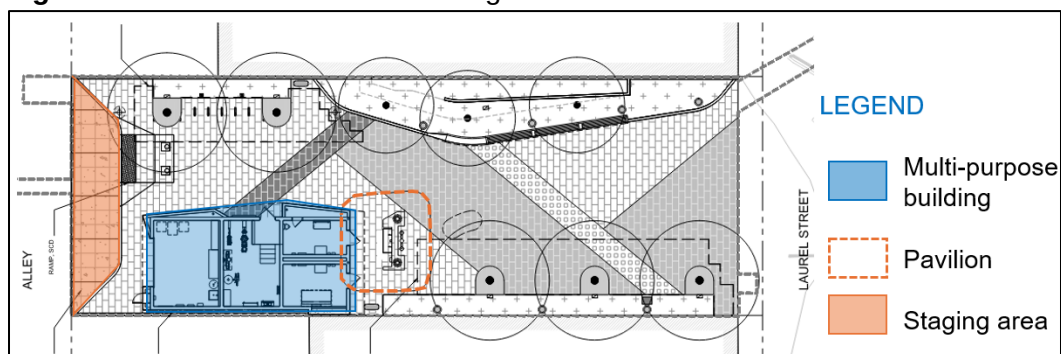
Project Description

Key features incorporated into the proposed redevelopment of Harrington Park, as guided by the community engagement process, various City Council Study Sessions, and as set forth in the adopted Downtown Streetscape Master Plan include:

- New paving layout and design (existing donor bricks will be retained and incorporated into the new paving design)
- New trees and landscaping
- New public seating arrangement
- New multi-purpose building with restrooms, storage, and utility room
- New mass timber pavilion attached to the multi-purpose building
- New staging area/multi-purpose curb zone adjacent to the alley

The overall site plan is shown in Figure 2 below and in the project plans (Attachment 2), which are consistent with the adopted Downtown Streetscape Master Plan and the Final Design approved by the City Council on June 9, 2025 under Resolution No. 2025-054.

Figure 2. Overall Site Plan for Harrington Park



Multi-Purpose Building

The proposed multi-purpose building is 679 square-feet in floor area and is located along the northwestern border of the park (abutting 753 Laurel Street). The placement of the multi-purpose building requires a Variance from the minimum interior side and rear setbacks in accordance with Chapter 18.32 of the San Carlos Municipal Code (SCMC), which is discussed further in the report.

The multi-purpose building, shown in Figure 3 below, would include two restrooms with one fully-accessible ADA restroom (including a universal changing station suitable for persons of all ages), a standard restroom, sink facilities, a plumbing/water pump room for a future water feature/fountain in the 700 Block (Phase 1B), and an overflow storage space for use by the City's Public Works and Parks and Recreation Departments. The multi-purpose building also consists of an attached cedar pavilion extending over a drinking fountain, bottle-filling station, and additional handwashing station outside the restrooms.

Figure 3. Proposed Design for Harrington Park Multi-Purpose Building



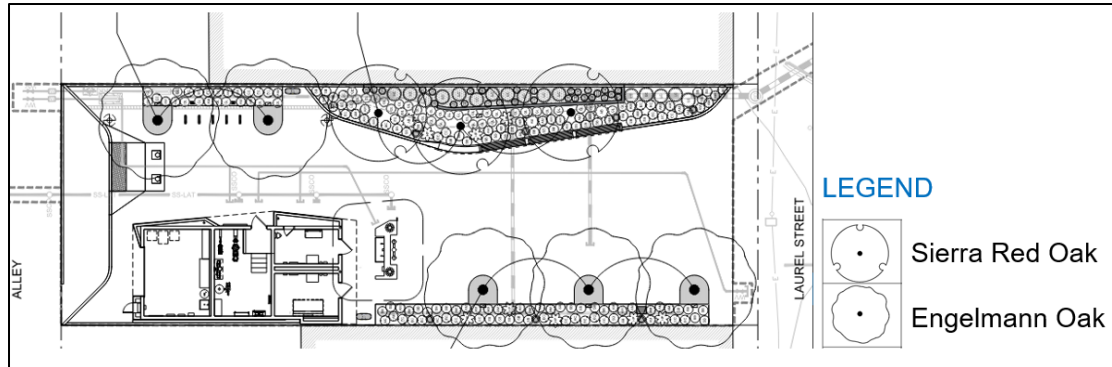
Planting and Paving Plans

A total of 16 existing trees (including small trees) would be removed and replaced with five Engelmann Oak trees and three Sierra Red Oak trees (see Figure 4 below). Of the 16 trees, ten trees qualify as protected trees and require a Protected Tree Removal Permit for removal, which will be discussed further in the report.

Harrington Park also consists of existing trees and benches with memorial plaques. Parks and Recreation will be seeking direction from the City Council to determine relocation preferences. However, the donor bricks will be relocated within the new design of Harrington Park. New pavers are colored concrete and are placed in a geometric pattern, varying in size and color. Paving will

also incorporate permeable pavers that match in color and texture. The lighting plan includes a mix of contemporary-style light posts, underlighting beneath seating areas, and catenary (string/market) lights near the central portions of Harrington Park.

Figure 4. Overall Planting Plan for Harrington Park



FINDINGS:

Design Review

The scope of Design Review involves the review of the project's overall site design, architectural design of the structures, including massing, proportions, materials, colors, and landscaping. To approve the Design Review request, the Planning and Transportation Commission must make the following five findings pursuant to SCMC Section 18.29.070. When reviewing the design and findings below, staff requests the Commission note the consistency of the design with the adopted Downtown Streetscape Master Plan and with the Final Design for Phase 1A subsequently approved by the City Council on June 9, 2025 by Resolution No. 2025-054 (see Attachment 3).

Finding A. *That the proposal is consistent with the applicable standards and requirements of this title [Title 18, Zoning Ordinance].*

Basis for Finding: The project is consistent with the applicable standards and requirements of SCMC Chapter 18.08, Public and Semi-Public Districts, specifically section 18.08.040 pertaining to development standards for projects in the Park (PK) zoning district, with the exception of the interior side and rear setbacks for which a Variance is requested. Table 1 below lists the required development standards and the project's compliance to those standards.

Table 1. Compliance with Zoning Code Requirements

Development Standard: PK	Requirement	Proposed
Maximum Height	30'-0"	14'-6"
Minimum Setbacks		
Front	30'-0"	86'-6"
Interior Side (Left)	10'-0"	0'-0" (Variance requested)
Interior Side (Right)	10'-0"	26'-6"
Rear	20'-0"	14'-11" (Variance requested)

Finding B. *That the proposal is consistent with the General Plan and any applicable specific plans the City Council has adopted.*

Basis for Finding: The proposal, which involves the redevelopment of Harrington Park and creation of a new multi-purpose building, is consistent with the General Plan in that it aligns with policies aimed at enhancing public gathering spaces in and around downtown. In particular, the proposal is consistent with the following General Plan Land Use policies:

- LU-2.13 *Maintain Downtown and Burton Park as the city's central gathering places.*
- LU-2.15 *Provide for and encourage the development of parks and public gathering places in and near Downtown.*
- LU-8.9 *Encourage the design of attractive outdoor pedestrian spaces that encourage impromptu public gathering places with features such as plazas, interior walkways and paseos, ornamental gates, trellises, lighting, trees and landscaping, seating and fountains.*

In addition, the proposal is consistent with the adopted Downtown Streetscape Master Plan, a key component of the in-progress Downtown Specific Plan that furthers the General Plan Land Use policies above. The proposed layout of Harrington Park is consistent with the illustrative plan shown in Figure 3.6 of the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan, incorporating special elements such as custom benches, murals, and native plantings to further enrich the downtown experience. The multi-purpose building, which is one-story and 14 feet, six inches in height, is compatible with the scale of adjacent one-story commercial buildings. The attached mass timber pavilion structure and reflective accent tile also enhance visual character of the building.

Finding C. *That the proposal is consistent with any applicable design guidelines adopted by the City Council.*

Basis for Finding: The proposal is consistent with design guidelines found in the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan, particularly surrounding materials and furnishings that reinforce Harrington Park as part of the downtown's social and business core. The proposal's materials palette includes permeable concrete unit pavers, cast in place concrete paving, and natural wood, which are consistent with materials strategy shown in Figure 3.29 of the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan. These materials are warm in tone and light in color palette to enhance the human scale and pedestrian-oriented experience. The proposal incorporates a geometric paving pattern for variation, as well as natural wood elements are to further a warm and inviting atmosphere.

Finding D. *That the proposal is consistent with any approved tentative map, use permit, variance, or other planning or zoning approval that the project required.*

Basis for Finding: The proposal requires approval of a Variance to allow for the multi-purpose building within the required interior side and rear setbacks. The required findings for the Variance are discussed further below.

Finding E. *That the proposal is consistent with the applicable design review criteria in Section 18.29.060, Design Review Criteria.*

Basis for Finding: The proposal is consistent with the applicable design review criteria in Section 18.29.060 for the reasons as previously outlined in Findings B and C above.

Variance

The proposal requires a Variance to permit the placement of the multi-purpose buildings within

the interior side and rear setbacks normally required in SCMC Section 18.08.030. The project proposes a zero setback along the interior side setback (northern property line) where a minimum 10-foot setback is required. The project also proposes a 14-foot, 11-inch rear setback where a minimum 20-foot setback is required. Pursuant to SCMC Section 18.32.040, the Planning and Transportation Commission shall make all of the following findings to approve the Variance request:

Finding A. *There are exceptional or extraordinary circumstances or conditions applicable to the property involved that do not apply generally to property in the vicinity and identical zoning classification, and that the granting of a variance will not constitute a granting of a special privilege inconsistent with the limitations on the property in the vicinity and identical zone classifications.*

Basis for Finding: The property is uniquely situated as the only site zoned Park (PK) on the 700 block of Laurel Street where these minimum interior side and rear setbacks apply. The nearest property zoned PK is City Hall Park, located approximately 1,100 feet away from the subject property (measured in a straight-line distance). All other properties on the 700 block are zoned Mixed-Use Downtown Core (MU-DC-100) which has no minimum interior side or rear setbacks unless the property is adjacent to a single-family zone (RS). Given the character of the 700 block of Laurel Street, nearly all existing buildings have a zero setback along their side property lines. Placing the multi-purpose building along the northern, interior side property line would appear visually consistent with nearby properties and allows for a wider pedestrian path from the existing alley to the 700 block of Laurel Street. In addition, granting a reduced rear setback will not result in visual or other adverse impacts to neighboring properties, as the site backs onto an existing alley. The granting of the Variance thus will not grant further privileges that are not already enjoyed by adjacent properties and will not result in negative impacts to neighboring properties.

Finding B. *The granting of the application is necessary to prevent a physical hardship which is not of the applicant's own actions or the actions of a predecessor in interest.*

Basis for Finding: The property's narrow width (approximately 50 feet) creates a physical hardship that would limit the proposal's ability to fulfill objectives of the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan if the required interior side and rear setbacks were applied. To comply with the minimum 10-foot setbacks on each side, the multi-purpose building would need to be placed toward the center of the site, which would be suboptimal for the enjoyment of the property as a public park. Applying the required 20-foot rear setback would have a similar impact, forcing the multi-purpose building toward the front of the property and constraining opportunities for uninterrupted public open space and cohesive landscaping adjacent to the pedestrianized 700 block of Laurel Street. The placement of the multi-purpose building would still allow for a staging area and multi-purpose curb zone along the alley and would be sufficiently sized for Harrington Park's and the future Phase 1B's servicing needs (i.e. storage, equipment room, and public restrooms).

Finding C. *The granting of the application will not be detrimental or injurious to property or improvements in the vicinity, and will not be detrimental to the public health, safety, general welfare or convenience.*

Basis for Finding: The proposal otherwise conforms with the development standards of Chapter 18.08, Design Review criteria of Chapter 18.29, and the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan. The redevelopment of Harrington Park continues the existing use of the site as a public park and enhances the overall character of the park with new landscaping, furnishings, and materials. The development of a new multi-purpose building also serves future needs of the community through the creation of two new public restrooms and storage rooms. The design and placement of these

elements, including the proposed multi-purpose building, altogether help enrich the downtown experience.

Finding D. *The granting of the variance will be consistent with the general purposes and objectives of this title, any applicable specific plans, and of the General Plan.*

Basis for Finding: The proposal otherwise conforms with the requirements of the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan, Zoning Code, and General Plan for the reasons outlined previously in this report.

Protected Tree Removal Permit

The proposal requests removal of all 16 trees existing on the site, which include the following species ranging from 3 inches to 19 inches in diameter: Chinese Pistache, Marina Madrone, Southern Magnolia, Crape Myrtle, and Evergreen Ash. Of the 16 trees, ten trees are considered significant trees (and thus protected trees) due to their diameter (11 inches or more, measured at 54 inches above natural grade). No heritage trees exist on the property.

Pursuant to SCMC Section 18.18.070, a Protected Tree Removal Permit may only be issued if sufficient justification for the removal is provided. The City's consulting Arborist has prepared an arborist report (see Attachment 4) evaluating all existing trees on the property and their suitability for preservation. Based on their assessment of the existing trees, the arborist has concluded that all 16 existing trees are recommended for removal as all trees will be impacted by the redevelopment, making preservation impractical.

As part of the Protected Tree Removal Permit, replacement trees shall be planted at a 1:1 ratio for removal of all protected trees with a minimum 24-inch box size tree. Eight trees, including five Engelmann Oak trees and three Sierra Red Oak trees would replace the existing trees. In addition to the eight trees within Harrington Park, it is anticipated that the remainder of streetscape improvements (such as Phase 1B, 600 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street) will result in a net gain of trees to offset for the deficiency of two trees within the Phase 1A portion.

PUBLIC NOTICE:

Pursuant to SCMC Section 18.29.040(E), the required public notice was mailed on Wednesday September 24, 2025 to all property owners and occupants within a 300-foot radius of the property's boundary and published in the San Mateo Daily Journal on Thursday, September 25, 2025. See Attachment 5.

Staff has not received any public comments as of the preparation of this staff report.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION:

This project has been determined to be exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to sections 15303 and 15304, which exempt structures less than 2,500 square-feet in floor area and new landscaping respectively from further environmental review.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the Planning and Transportation Commission approve the request for Design Review for the redevelopment of Frank D. Harrington Park, Protected Tree Removal Permit for the removal of 10 protected trees, and Variance to allow a 679 square-foot multi-purpose building within the interior side and rear setbacks at 759 Laurel Street consistent with the adopted Downtown Streetscape Master Plan and the Final Design for Harrington Park as approved by the City Council on June 9, 2025 under Resolution No. 2025-054 based on the findings and reasons outlined in the staff report and subject to the conditions of approval included within Attachment 1.

MOTION:

I move that the Planning and Transportation Commission grant approval for Design Review, Protected Tree Removal Permit, and Variance for the redevelopment of Frank D. Harrington Park at 759 Laurel Street (APN: 050-154-160 and 050-154-170) based on the findings, conditions of approval, and for the reasons incorporated in the staff report.

FURTHER ACTION:

The Planning and Transportation Commission action will be final, unless appealed to the City Council within 10 days of the date of action. The deadline to file an appeal is 5:00 p.m. **Thursday, October 16, 2025.**

Respectfully submitted by:

Rendell Bustos, Senior Planner

ATTACHMENT(S):

1. Variance and Code Compliance Certificate
2. Project Plans
3. City Council Resolution No. 2025-054
4. Arborist Report
5. Public Noticing Materials