

D E S I G N
R E V I E W
C O M M I T T E E
S T A F F R E P O R T

For Committee Decision
OCTOBER 16, 2025

1890 Alcatraz Avenue

PRELIMINARY DESIGN REVIEW

Design Review #DRCP2025-0005 to demolish a 1-story commercial building (4,425 square feet) and construct a 3-story (39 feet and 4 inches) 6,016 square-foot community center with three off-street vehicle parking spaces.

I. Introduction

This three-story community services project is proposed on the south side of Alcatraz Avenue, between Dover and Adeline, in the C-AC Adeline Corridor Commercial District.

The demolition referral went before the Landmarks Preservation Commission on September 4, 2025, where the Commission took no action. The project will go before the Zoning Adjustments Board on an upcoming agenda for approval of its Use Permit.

The project is before the Design Review Committee this month for Preliminary Design Review.

II. Background

The proposed project would demolish the existing 1-story building to construct a new 6,016 square-foot community center (the African American Holistic Resource Center) and includes the following primary components:

- 3 stories, 39 feet and 4 inches in height to the top of the roof parapet
- Three off-street vehicle parking spaces
- Three bicycle parking spaces

The Resource Center would host services to benefit the community with education, employment, health, mental health, and housing advocacy and support. The building program includes: meditation garden, outdoor event space, offices, teaching kitchen, assembly spaces, conference rooms, library/media room, studios, and a rooftop event space with an edible garden.

III. Project Setting

A. Neighborhood/Area Description:

The subject site is located in South Berkeley, and consists of an approximately 9,700 square-foot parcel (Assessor's Parcel Number 52-1527-24-1). The site has frontage on the south side of Alcatraz Avenue and is mid-block between Adeline Street to the West and Dover Street to the East. It is within the Adeline Corridor Commercial district and the Adeline Corridor Plan area. It is East of the Lorin District, a state-registered historic district that includes several landmarked structures.

The area is characterized by commercial and residential buildings that are one to three stories tall. Commercial uses include a mix of retail, cultural, and community-based uses. The site is served by Alameda County Transit buses and is within a half mile of the Ashby BART station. Alcatraz Avenue has bike lanes and on-street parking in both directions.

B. Site Conditions:

The site is developed with a one-story building located on the northern edge of the property along Alcatraz Avenue. The site is accessed via a gated driveway from Alcatraz Avenue. The driveway runs along the eastern side of the property to a small parking lot and gated courtyard to the south behind the building.

The existing building was constructed in 1958 and operated first as a retail store. In 1972, the property was sold to the City of Berkeley who operated the South Berkeley Model Cities Office. The office served the community by operating a resource center for South Berkeley community members to find jobs and housing. The office also provided support services for youth in the South Berkeley community. The property was subsequently occupied by various health organizations throughout the 1980s. In 1989, the building was heavily renovated for the Berkeley Adult Health Center, which operated an office from 1989 to 2023. The building is currently vacant.

Based on a structural assessment performed in 2022, the existing building does not meet current building codes and a renovation and structural retrofit of the building is economically infeasible.

Figure 1: Vicinity Map

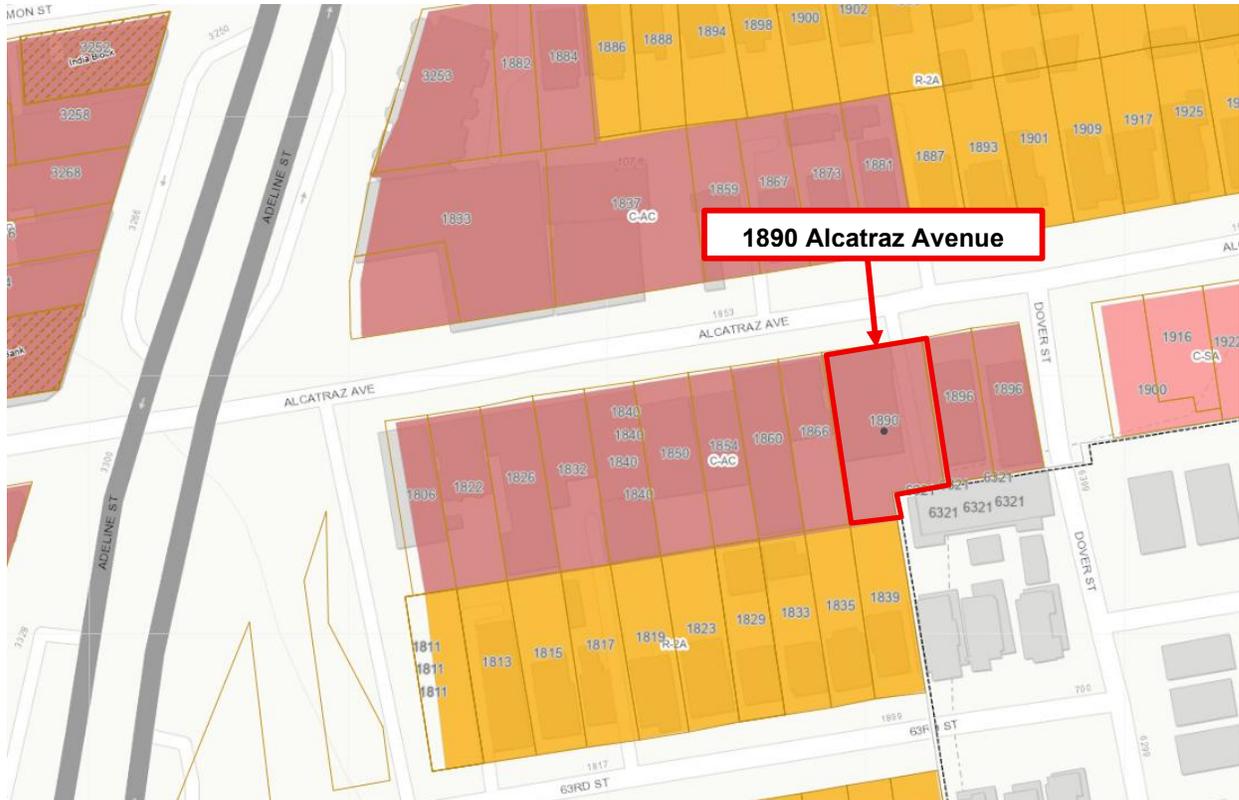


Table 1: Land Use Information

Comparison of Adjacent Properties			
Vicinity	GP Land Use	Zoning	Current Use
Subject Property	Adeline Corridor Mixed Use (ACMU)	Adeline Corridor Commercial (C-AC)	Health center
North	Adeline Corridor Mixed Use (ACMU)	Adeline Corridor Commercial (C-AC) and Restricted Multiple-Family Residential (R-2A)	Residential and commercial buildings
South	Mixed Use Residential (MDR)	Restricted Multiple-Family Residential (R-2A)	Single- and Two-family Residential
East	Adeline Corridor Mixed Use (ACMU)	Adeline Corridor Commercial (C-AC)	Multi-family residential
West	Adeline Corridor Mixed Use (ACMU)		Preschool

Table 2: Development Standards

Standard		Existing	Addition/ (Reduction)	Proposed Total	Permitted/ Required
Lot Area (sq. ft.)		9,755	No change	No change	N/A
Gross Floor Area (sq. ft.)		3,910	2,106	6,016	N/A
Floor Area Ratio		.40	.25	.65	2.8
Building Height	Maximum (ft.)	-	-	39'-4"	45'
	Stories	1	(2)	3	3
Building Setbacks (ft. - in.)	Front (North) (Alcatraz)	0'	1'-2"	1'-2"	0'
	Interior Side (East)	28'-2"	2'- 8"	25'-6"	0'
	Interior Side (West)	0'	No change	0'	0'
	Rear (South)	34' to 54'	19'	53' to 73'	10'; 20' when height exceeds 35'
Lot Coverage (%)		40	(9)	31	100%
Usable Open Space (sq. ft.)		5,845	839	6,684	0
Parking	Automobile	6	(3)	3	0 per AB 2097 ^a
	Bicycle	--	--	3	3 (1 per 2,000 sq. ft)
Abbreviations: sq. ft. = square feet; max. = maximum; min. = minimum; n/a = not applicable; % = percent; avg. = average, ft = feet ('), in. = inches (")					
Notes: ^a AB-2097 , effective January 1, 2023, prohibits local jurisdictions from requiring minimum parking for most non-residential uses located within a 1/2 mile of public transit.					

IV. Project Description

A. Requested Use Permits

- Use permit under BMC Section 23.326.070(A) "Main Non-Residential Building" to demolish a non-residential building;
- Use permit under BMC Section 23.204.020 (A) "Allowed Land Uses" to construct a new community center; and
- Use permit under BMC Section 23.204.030(A)(1) "Floor Area Permit Requirements" to create a new main building.

B. CEQA Determination

It is staff's recommendation that the project is categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA, Public Resources Code Section 21000, et seq. and California Code of Regulations, Section 15000, et seq.) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15332 ("In-Fill Development Projects").

V. Design Review Guidelines

The following Design Guidelines from the Adeline Corridor Specific Plan apply to the proposed project. The complete document can be found at:

<https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/2022-03/Adeline-Corridor-Specific-Plan.pdf>

3.3 BUILDING DESIGN

1. Building Bulk and Mass

Incorporate the following design strategies to reduce the perceived mass and bulk of new buildings:

- **Modulate Length on New Buildings.** Modulate the length of individual new buildings (i.e. the linear distance of the building facade along the street) on any single block face by incorporating large and small massing breaks at regular intervals (50 to 100 feet) along street frontages.
- **Reduce Bulk of Large Buildings.** Design large buildings to appear as an aggregation of smaller buildings rather than a single large block or box.
- **Use Building Mass.** Use building mass to frame adjoining streets, plazas, open spaces, and pathways. Upper story step back and unique corner treatment.
- **Use Ground Floor Articulation.** Use ground floor articulation (recesses, structural bays, varied setbacks, etc.) to create a pedestrian scale along the sidewalk.
- **Distinct Building Levels.** Design buildings with a distinct ground floor, middle, and top.
- **Vary Facade Details for Visual Interest.** Vary materials, color, texture, ornamentation, and/or other facade details to provide visual interest, reduce the perception of height, and distinguish between upper and ground floors.

2. Horizontal and Vertical Articulation

Incorporate the following design strategies for horizontal and vertical articulation in new buildings:

- **Vary Horizontal Length of Facades.** Incorporate massing breaks, projections, architectural details, and variations in materials and color to break up the horizontal length of facades. Provide some form of architectural articulation every 25 to 50 feet to promote visual interest and a comfortable pedestrian scale.

- Varied Architectural Elements or Roof Forms. Integrate architectural elements or varied roof forms at regular intervals to articulate long horizontal rooflines along street frontages.
- Break Up Vertical Height of Buildings. Use step backs, recesses, structural bays, articulation in wall planes, architectural details, and variations in materials and color to break up the vertical height of buildings.

3.5 Ground Floor Frontages and Facades

1. Guidelines for All Ground Floor Uses

The following design guidelines apply to all types of ground floor frontages in the Plan Area:

- Minimum Setback. When possible, build to the minimum setback to establish a street wall close to the pedestrian realm. Minor variations in building facade and publicly accessible plazas or open spaces are also encouraged.
- Facades Facing Public Street. For nonresidential space, design all facades facing a public space (street, sidewalk, open space, or walkway) to be active, transparent, and visually interesting. Variations such as changes in color, material, and/or texture are encouraged.
- Reduced Blank Walls. Blank walls (facades without doors, windows, landscaping treatments, or other elements of pedestrian interest) should be less than 30 feet in length along sidewalks, pedestrian paths, or open space.
- Humanizing Design Elements. Provide awnings, signage, and other humanizing design elements to generate a pedestrian scale.
- Vary Ground Floor Facades from Upper Floors. Design the street-facing facades of ground floors with a distinctly different character from upper floors (distinguished by a greater floor-to-ceiling height, greater articulation, finer design details, unique colors, enhanced ground floor entrances, and/or architectural variation).

VI. Issues and Analysis

A. Design Review Issues:

Building Design/ Massing Proposed building has been designed with the surrounding neighborhood in mind. The modern design was selected through community input.

Encroachments Project proposes an encroachment at the Northeast Corner with one corner bay extending over the property line on Alcatraz. As shown on building section 1/A-313, the proposed encroachment does not start until the second floor line. The applicant will work with Public Works to obtain any necessary encroachment permits for this condition.

Ground Floor Design Project locates the main entrance and lobby on the Alcatraz frontage. Although there is a substantial amount of glazing proposed, there is also a significant amount of metal screen proposed as well. 30% transparency between 3' and 10' above grade is a goal in the Adeline Corridor Plan, and the proposed metal panels will meet that. The ground floor height is more than 12' required for this area in the Adeline Corridor Plan.

Landscape/Open Space Proposed landscape plan and plant legend have been included for your reference.

Colors and Materials Materials for the project include metal panels, stucco walls, storefront glazing, and perforated metal panels. Material legends can be found on Sheets A-301 and A-302 along with rendered elevations.

Street Trees Plans show the street tree in front of the existing building remains. While Staff understands that the tree to the east of the driveway has Fireblight and this will affect its survival, a recommended suitable replacement would be Southern Live Oak (*Quercus virginiana*) or Nettleleaf Oak (*Quercus rugosa*) with irrigation. Irrigation to the existing street tree is also recommended.

B. Issues for Discussion:

- Neighborhood Context
- Building Design
- Open Space Design
- Colors and Materials

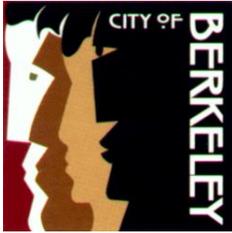
VII. Recommendation

Staff recommends that the DRC discuss the above issues and forward a favorable recommendation to ZAB with any conditions as necessary and specific direction for Final Design Review.

Attachments:

1. Project Plans, received October 2, 2025 (massing and site plan exhibits only have been uploaded on-line consistent with SB1214 requirements)
2. Applicant Statement, received December 31, 2024

Staff Planner: Anne Burns, aburns@berkeleyca.gov, (510) 981-7410



PARKS, RECREATION AND WATERFRONT DEPARTMENT

Applicant Statement

African American Holistic Resource Center Project Zoning Project Application Application for Use Permit Section 1-B

The proposed African American Holistic Resource Center (AAHRC) will be a new City-owned community services building that would replace an existing 3,910 square foot single-story City-owned commercial building with a new 2-story community building. The new building has a proposed footprint of 3,170 square feet, and a gross floor area of 6,340 square foot.

Based on a structural assessment performed in 2022, the existing building does not meet current building codes and a renovation and structural retrofit of the building is economically infeasible. The existing building is proposed to be demolished and a new building constructed. The new building will be a two-story structure with roof amenities for additional program space, but the proposed lot coverage is less than the existing building.

The AAHRC will focus on serving African American Berkeley residents, particularly people from the historic South and West Berkeley neighborhoods, and those displaced from Berkeley who have been disproportionately impacted by racism and gentrification, and would benefit from treatment and services provided in a culturally responsive and supportive way. The AAHRC will be open to all, however the focus of the AAHRC will be to enhance strengthen, and validate African American/Black identity, cultural values, and traditions. The AAHRC will support participants by using community-defined and culturally appropriate approaches and practices in order to decrease inequities and disparities in all aspects of life for the African American population in Berkeley.

Proposed services include health education and screening, mental wellness, educational supports and tutoring, social services referrals, cultural/ethnic events, recreational programming, community meetings, and other community services.

The first-floor plan includes a public lobby, teaching kitchen, two large community meeting spaces, and restrooms. The second story plan includes a conference room, a flexible community space, a library/computer room, two offices, two studios, two small services rooms, and additional restrooms. The roof plan includes outdoor event space, an edible garden, an outdoor kitchen, a single restroom, and photovoltaic panels.

Application for Use Permit
African American Holistic Resource Center

The ground floor plan includes a garden, outdoor open space, vehicle parking, bike parking, trash enclosure, and other related items needed to serve the building.

The City is applying for a Use Permit for the new facility, in accordance with the C-AC South Adeline Subarea Development Standards:

1890 Alcatraz Avenue Planning Summary, Non-Residential

	Required	Existing	Proposed
Lot Size	-	9,755 sf	9,755 sf
Lot Coverage, Max.	100%	40%	32%
Building Footprint, Max.	7,005 sf	3,910 sf	3,170 sf
Building Gross Floor Area, Max.	21,015 sf	3,910 sf	6,340 sf
Setbacks, Min.			
Front	0'-0"	0'-0"	0'-0"
Rear	10'-0"	50'-10"	73'-11"
Side (Left)	0'-0"	29'-1"	25'-8"
Side (Right)	0'-0"	0'-0"	0'-0"
Building Separation, Min.	0'-0"	0'-0"	0'0"
Building Height (Stories)	3	1	2
Building Height, Max.	45'-0"	12'	37'-9"

The proposed project will promote municipal health and welfare opportunities for Black residents, Adeline corridor neighbors and benefit the City and its residents as a whole.