

## The San Diego Union-Tribune

# Large office building proposed for Little Italy

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The design committee of Civic San Diego, the city's downtown planning agency, on Wednesday praised plans for a large office building in Little Italy that will take up an entire city block.

Encompassing a 1.2-acre site between Ivy and Hawthorn streets, the Los Angeles-based Kilroy Realty project would take the place of five old commercial buildings, including a dilapidated warehouse. It would be the most office space in a single building in Little Italy.

The six-story building would include roughly 178,800 square feet of office space, 14,929 square feet of retail and 280 parking spots. Renderings of the project show a modern building that mixes a brick exterior with black metal paneling.

"I think this is a gift to the community in terms of its design," said committee director Stephen Russell. "It does incorporate a lot of the flavored texture and variety that makes it seem like it's not a monolithic block."

Kilroy's project will eventually need the approval of the full Civic San Diego board, and city government after that. The project could begin construction as early as November, Kilroy said.

Committee members were concerned about blank concrete walls on the site, including one facing trains, because it could become a magnet for graffiti. Dale Shimek, Kilroy senior project manager, said it would begin work on alternatives, including a spot for public art.

"We'll look at bringing the (materials) down, we'll look at art possibilities, our whole bag of tricks," he told the committee.

The developer purchased the site in late 2017 [for \\$19.4 million](#) and hired the Gensler architecture firm to design the structure.

After a [surge of apartment buildings](#) in Little Italy this year, anticipated to include 559 units by the end of the year, neighborhood representatives said they welcome more space for people to work in the area.

“I think we are hitting our limit of restaurants and bars in Little Italy,” said Marco LiMandri, administrator of the Little Italy Association. “We want high-density housing, but we also want to balance that with work areas, too.”

Matt Carlson, senior vice president of commercial real estate investment firm CBRE, said what makes the development in Little Italy unique is office builders typically shy away from there because of height limitations caused by the airport. CBRE will handle leasing for the building once it is approved.

“You haven’t seen any new office product in that submarket,” Carlson said. “I think that the real excitement and interest on Kilroy’s land is it is in this great neighborhood. It’s got great residential, it’s got great retail, it’s got all these destination restaurants.”

There is roughly 525,000 square feet of office space in Little Italy but none is considered Class A, or high-end, like the Kilroy project, said CBRE data. The biggest office space in the neighborhood right now, 610 West Ash St., has about 1,000 square feet less than what is planned by Kilroy.

The office building would be directly across from the new AV8 apartments on Kettner Boulevard with 129 units. A luxury building with numerous amenities, monthly rent for a studio starts at \$2,210.

In a contrast to the high-end units at AV8, the lot across the street purchased by Kilroy is a relic of Little Italy’s past as a less-desirable place. Buildings that will be demolished — including old warehouses (much of which is covered in graffiti) and a car rental business — do not have historic significance, said Civic San Diego’s staff report.

“Transforming an entire block of underused lots and vacant storefronts into 200,000 square feet of Class A office space, ground floor retail and outdoor plazas cannot happen soon enough for our growing downtown community,” wrote Downtown San Diego Partnership CEO Betsy Brennan in an email.

Additional plans for the building include a 1,900-square-foot courtyard along Kettner Boulevard to provide an entry for retail and a public courtyard, as well as a 10,226-square-foot rooftop deck for office building tenants. Parking will have two above-ground parking floors and one and a half below ground.

Civic San Diego staff said the economic impact of the project will be 201 construction jobs and 396 permanent jobs once the building opens.