

CITY OF LA CAÑADA FLINTRIDGE

PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

June 14, 2016 Meeting

Applicant:

Jay Johnson
1125 Foothill Blvd.
La Canada Flintridge, CA 91011

Case Type / Numbers:

Second Floor Review 16-04
Floor Area Review 16-02
Setback Modification 16-01
Variance 16-02

Property Owner:

Harmeet Singh
4377 Chevy Chase Drive
La Canada Flintridge, CA 91011

Site Address:

4377 Chevy Chase Drive

Case Planner:

Chris Gjolme ~ Planner

1. Request:

The request is for Second Floor Review to allow a 2,268 sq. ft. 2nd-floor addition to an existing single-story residence. Floor Area Review is also required since total project area would exceed 4,500 sq. ft. on a lot with an average width of less than 80 feet; the subject lot is 75 feet wide. Demolition of existing floor/roof area to accommodate the 2nd floor would exceed 30%, thereby qualifying the project as 'new' construction. Two additional entitlements are required accordingly; a Setback Modification to allow retention of the home's existing 6'-4" south side setback and a pool house's 6-foot north side setback, and a Variance to allow retention of a non-conforming circular driveway.

2. Location:

The site is along the west side of Chevy Chase Drive, mid-block between Foothill Blvd. and Descanso Drive, in the R-1-20,000 zone.

3. Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the request **BE APPROVED**, subject to the conditions listed in Exhibit "A", attached to the draft resolution.

4. Project Size:

Lot Size:	22,003 sq. ft.
Proposed 1 st floor (inc. garage):	3,781 sq. ft.
Proposed 2 nd floor:	2,268 sq. ft.
Remodeled pool house:	98 sq. ft.
Total:	6,147 sq. ft.

5. General Plan / Zoning / Existing Land Use:

The Land Use Map identifies the site as Very low Density Residential (up to 2 dwelling units per acre). The property is zoned R-1-20,000 (Single Family Residential, 20,000 Square Foot Minimum Lot Size). The site is currently developed with a one-story residence, detached pool house and swimming pool.

6. Environmental Impact Review:

Staff has determined that the proposed Second-floor Review and Floor Area Review are Categorically Exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act, under Class 2.5(a)(4)(ii)(additions) and 2.5(e)(1)(minor yard and setback variances) of the City of La Cañada Flintridge Guidelines for the Implementation of CEQA.

7. Previous Action:

- Floor Area Review 03-22 - request to allow 1st and 2nd-floor additions to an existing residence that would yield total project area of new 6,150 sq. ft., above the 4,500 sq. ft. threshold for 'narrow' lots. Application withdrawn on 6/9/2005.
- Floor Area Review 04-11 - request to allow 1st and 2nd-floor additions to an existing residence that would yield total project area of new 6,150 sq. ft., above the 4,500 sq. ft. threshold for 'narrow' lots. Approved 9/28/2004.

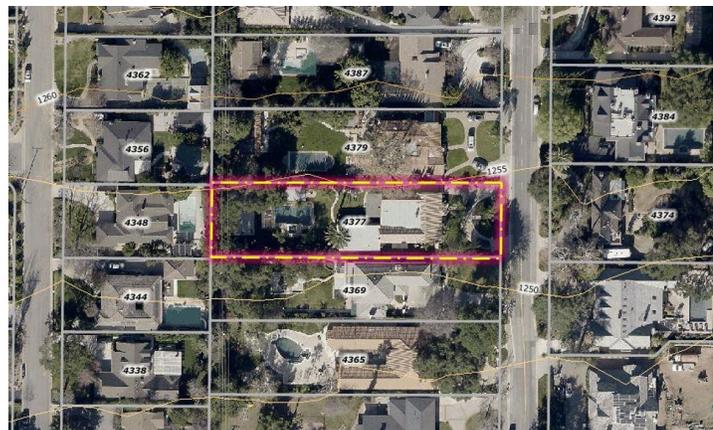
8. Pending and Potential Actions:

Plan check, Health Dept. & Fire Dept. approval, issuance of building permits.

9. Staff Analysis:

A. Context:

The long and narrow (75' x 293') site comprises 22,000 sq. ft., more than twice the underlying zone requirement, and is typical of lot configurations immediately to the north and south. Adjacent lots are almost identical in size and shape, though developed with larger two-story homes. Lots across the street are greater in width and of lesser depth, but comparable in size. The subject lot is basically flat and is developed with a modest single-story home. A circular driveway and low decorative



fence distinguish the front of the property. In general, properties in the immediate area are developed with a mixture of one and two-story homes that maintain generous front setbacks, and are framed by attractive yards.

The subject residence maintains a front setback in excess of 50 feet and largely compliant side setbacks to the north and south. However, a bedroom wing to the southwest currently provides a 6'-4" south side setback, below the 7'-6" typical standard for the lot and 8-foot modified standard that the project is held to given project floor area in excess of 4,500 sq. ft. Of note is the neighboring home to the south, the deep north elevation of which appears to encroach into the north side setback at both floor levels.

Currently, a garage is not provided on site. A review of aerial photography from 2006 seems to indicate that the rear bedroom wing may have been converted from a previously-existing garage. The photo shows paving and vehicles fronting this portion of the structure. Photos from 2008 show the paving removed and lawn area in its place. A review of permit information was inconclusive. Given that a compliant garage is proposed as part of the project and the area in question was/remains qualified floor area, albeit likely remodeled, the issue is somewhat moot.

B. Project Description:

The project involves 1st and 2nd-floor expansion of the existing residence, most notably creation of a new 2nd floor. Also of note is the creation of a compliant 2-car garage at the southeast corner of the structure. Partial demolition to the rear is also proposed.

The home's revamped footprint would comprise 3,781 sq. ft. and includes a spacious family room central to the floor plan, kitchen and adjacent dining area to the north, guest bedroom and expanded trellis structure to the rear and new 2-car garage. Creation of the garage would extend the home to the front, where a reduced yet compliant 59'-4" setback would be provided; three non-protected trees would be removed to accommodate internal extension of the driveway. To the north, a 12-foot setback would continue to be provided as measured to the façade. The 4-foot setback 'surplus' would allow placement of new mechanical equipment and creation of a small porch along the north side of the residence. Staff notes what appears to be posts for a porch roof shown on the floor plan, but the elevations indicate only a door and raised slab.

The second floor would necessitate roof/floor area removal well in excess of the 30% new construction qualifier. As such, the home's existing 6'-4" south side setback to the rear requires Setback Modification review and approval since it would continue to be below the 8-foot requirement for the lot. To the rear, a detached pool house is set back 6 feet from the north side property line. The pool house, even though a separate structure, also falls under purview of the Setback Modification since its roof would be removed and converted to an open trellis in order to utilize the floor area toward expansion of the house. Thus, though retained and remodeled as part of the project, the pool house also qualifies as a 'new' structure.

The new 2nd floor would be centrally positioned, with recesses of various depth incorporated on all sides. It would comprise 2,268 sq. ft., inclusive of three bedrooms, an activity room and 327 sq. ft. volume space to the front. Maximum second-floor depth would be 69 feet as presented to the south, reducing to 38 feet along the north side. Compliant 16-foot side setbacks are proposed to the north and south. Total floor area for the residence would be 6,049 sq. ft., translating to a 0.27 FAR. To the rear, the remodeled pool house would continue to provide an enclosed/roofed bathroom which would contribute an additional 93 sq. ft., increasing total project floor area to 6,142 sq. ft., within the 6,150 sq. ft. limit for the site.

Building height would be consistent given the relatively flat pad; a maximum height of 27 feet would be achieved at the high ridge, well below the 32-foot standard for the lot. The roof form is varied and interesting and consistent with the home’s design and massing. Side setbacks would combine with the limited height to achieve angle-plane compliance as demonstrated on Sheet A-7.

A comparison of the site plan and survey reveals an increase to the width of the existing driveway from approximately 12 feet to 15 feet. Combined with the paved access for the new garage, total resulting hardscape within the front yard would approach the 0.50 limit. This will be addressed further in Section F as part of the Variance discussion.

In all, the project compares with applicable code standards as follows:

	Standard:	Project:
Floor Area:	6,150 sf	6,142 sf
Front SB:	59 feet	59'-4"
North Side SB		
1 st floor:	8 feet	12 feet (res.), 6 feet (ph)
2 nd floor:	16 feet	16 feet
South Side SB		
1 st floor:	8 feet	6'-4"
2 nd floor:	16 feet	16 feet
Rear SB:	15 feet	128 feet (res.), 52' (ph)
Height:	32 feet	27 feet

C. Second Floor Review:

Discussion

The home’s design draws from Mediterranean influences, evidenced by asymmetrical stucco facades, tile roofs, arched moldings or openings and shallow eaves.

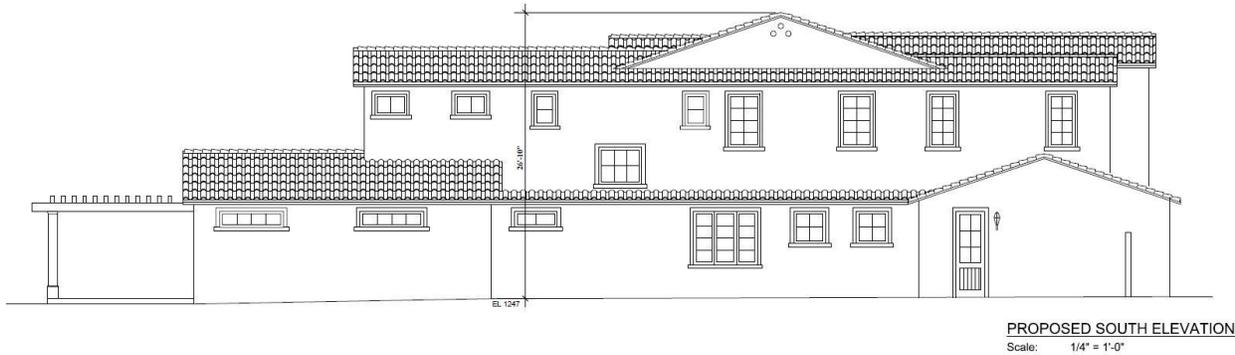
Setbacks would be appropriate for the size and scale of the home and commensurate to the configuration of the parcel. The new 2nd floor would achieve a significant depth to the south, with somewhat monotonous massing alleviated by the recess from the 1st floor, varied window array and use of two gables to disrupt an otherwise static eave

line. Together, these aspects provide an improved sense of separation when compared to the neighboring structure and its lesser setback along the entirety of the north façade. Another favorable consideration is the height of the project, which at 27 feet, would be 5 feet below the 32-foot limit for the site, and visually beneficial as seen from all sides.

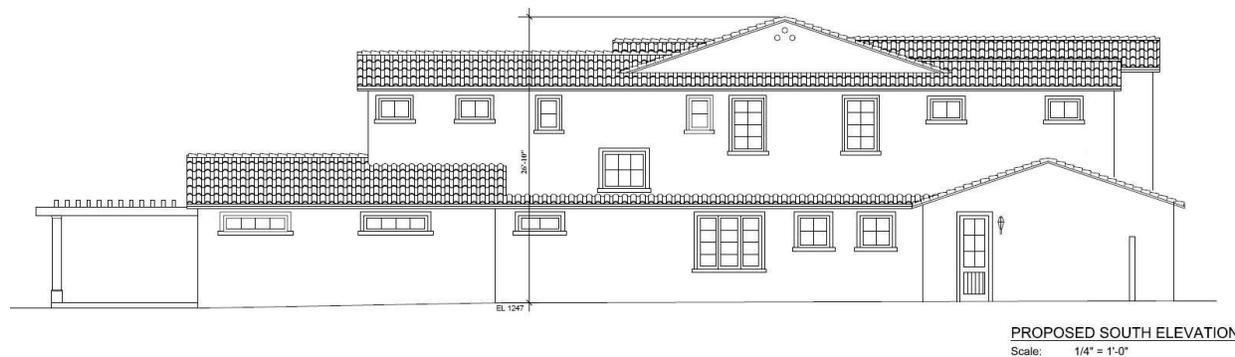
Given the proximity of deep 2nd floors, the interface between the south face of the project and the neighboring home to the south could yield an undesirable canyon-like effect between the two homes. As such, intervening landscaping is recommended along the south side property line (adj. photo) to buffer the expanded home and provide visual relief.



Lastly, staff has a minor comment on the south window array, which seems excessive along the front half, where four full-size windows are proposed, two bedroom and two activity room windows (*the 2nd-floor plan shows a third activity room window, which staff assumes is erroneous*). Compared with the use of much smaller windows to the rear, albeit two of which are closet windows, a lopsided effect results, imparting the impression of a disjointed 2nd floor. Additionally, the forward-most window appears crowded by the garage ridge. Relief is achievable through conversion of the activity room windows from full-size windows to transom windows. This would visually correlate the ends of the south elevation and improve its overall appearance in staff's estimation. Importantly, the lighting effect from conversion to transom windows would be adequately offset by the glass terrace doors and windows proposed along the east side of the activity room. A condition requiring this change is not included at this point; rather, staff offers it for consideration. Comparison shown on next page.



As submitted (above); modified by staff (below)



The master bedroom would include a balcony to the rear, though its modest size and central location suggest a lack of offsite impact. To the south, it would be recessed behind and entirely buffered by bedroom #2 and to the north, partly enclosed by the south face of the master bathroom and adequately screened. Some views would be possible, as is the case with any raised vantage point, but significant privacy impacts are not anticipated. In short, the balcony is regarded as an appropriate project component. The smaller activity room terrace to the front is similarly regarded as absent any significant view/privacy issues.

The City’s Residential Design Guidelines address four primary considerations, which are italicized in bold font. Staff’s favorable summary analysis of each consideration follows in parenthesis:

- ***Neighborhood Compatibility*** (the home’s architectural style combines with varied front and sides setbacks so that the 2-story mass of the structure is refined primarily as seen from the street. The size of the home is proportionate to the site while the overall visual scale of the home would not be excessive given the articulation demonstrated and limited height proposed. Two-story homes of varied designs are commonplace in the area, including adjacent homes to the north and south and across the street).

- **Site Development** (the home would utilize existing pad area and provide a new 2-car garage. The home's deep floor plan is commensurate to lot depth. The provision of compliant side setbacks combined with the lot's relative narrowness and achievement of allowable floor area also contribute to the home's depth, as is the case with other homes in the area.)
- **Physical Design Components** (the home's design offers visual distinction between the 1st and 2nd floors through recession of mass and a stepped roof design, important given the home's larger size, while the architecture provides adequate facade and roof articulation, the focus of which is the street-facing front elevation.)
- **Landscaping** (most existing landscaping would be retained while new plantings would buffer the subject residence to the south and provide relief between proximate second floors of notable depth.)

Findings

1. The two-story design includes adequate setbacks, screening and modulation.

The proposed residence would be articulated and detailed in a manner representative of the Mediterranean style while compliant and adequate setbacks are provided at both floor levels. Screening along the south side property line would be enhanced to buffer the subject residence and provide relief between proximate second floors. Staff supports the finding.

2. The two-story design preserves the existing scale and character of the surrounding neighborhood.

The proposed home is large, but sensitively massed, and would not convey an excessive visual scale. Other mid-to-large homes are found in the immediate area, including 2-story homes of varied design to the north and south, and across the street to the east. Staff supports the finding.

3. The two-story design protects public views, aesthetics, privacy and property values of the neighbors.

View of the new home would not have an unreasonable impact on public views in the area. Other two-story homes in the area are comparably massed and sited and the project would not significantly deviate from the prevailing character of the area. The rear balcony is appropriately configured and of limited size and the second-floor window array is commensurate to the respective interior space and not excessive. Staff supports the finding.

4. The two-story design is consistent with the Residential Design Guidelines as adopted by resolution of the City Council.

The scale, massing and materials utilized by the project, in particular the front elevation, are consistent with Mediterranean design and relate well with the site and the character of the immediate area. Primary directives of the City’s Residential Design Guidelines, the foremost consideration of which is neighborhood and streetscape compatibility, would be upheld by the project. Staff supports the finding.

D. Floor Area Review:

Discussion

The project presents an appropriate design for the area, tasteful massing and provides setbacks as required for the lot. It also offers building height at less than allowable limits to compensate for the total floor area sought. Ample setback opportunity is precluded to the sides by the lot’s width. However, the floor area as proposed is appropriate considering the lot’s size and comparable visual scale of other homes in the area, including the adjacent two-story houses to the north and south, the former of which is of similar design to that of the proposal, the latter of comparable size and depth.

Address	Lot Size	House Size	FAR	Stories
4349 Chevy Chase Drive	11,644 sf	6,749 sf	0.58	2
4350 Chevy Chase Drive	22,805 sf	4,077 sf	0.18	1
4351 Chevy Chase Drive	10,360 sf	4,368 sf	0.42	2
4357 Chevy Chase Drive	24,937 sf	5,273 sf	0.21	2
4358 Chevy Chase Drive	25,580 sf	5,779 sf	0.23	2
4365 Chevy Chase Drive	22,003 sf	4,993 sf	0.23	1
4366 Chevy Chase Drive	20,030 sf	5,143 sf	0.26	2
4369 Chevy Chase Drive	19,070 sf	4,138 sf	0.22	2
4374 Chevy Chase Drive	22,805 sf	2,017 sf	0.09	2
4379 Chevy Chase Drive	22,003 sf	3,737 sf	0.17	2
4384 Chevy Chase Drive	22,805 sf	5,301 sf	0.23	2
4387 Chevy Chase Drive	22,003 sf	2,444 sf	0.11	1
4392 Chevy Chase Drive	22,805 sf	3,086 sf	0.14	1
4393 Chevy Chase Drive	10,140 sf	2,930 sf	0.29	2
4395 Chevy Chase Drive	10,750 sf	1,747 sf	0.16	1
4401 Chevy Chase Drive	10,789 sf	2,394 sf	0.22	1
4403 Chevy Chase Drive	11,214 sf	4,116 sf	0.37	2
AVERAGE:	18,338 sf	4,017 sf	0.22	n/a
<i>4377 Chevy Chase Drive</i>	<i>22,003 sf</i>	<i>5,220 sf</i>	<i>0.24</i>	<i>2</i>

**Project site. Note - Above figures do not include garages, volume spaces, patios, and other non-habitable areas and are intended for general comparison only.*

A review of the above Floor Area Matrix indicates variation in parcel and house size within the immediate area, with parcels ranging from just over 10,000 sq. ft. to over 25,000 sq. ft. and homes ranging from 1,747 sq. ft. to 6,700 sq. ft. Though the proposal would be above the 'average' house size, the project's adjusted 0.24 FAR is consistent with the 0.22 FAR average and the FARs demonstrated by 10 other homes in the sample group. In all, the new residence is suited to the site and is not significantly discordant with the character of the area due to the precedence of other 2-story homes and lack of uniformity in house size and design.

Finding

1. Through its siting, screening, and/or massing effects, the project is compatible with its neighborhood setting.

The design of the new home is tasteful and well-conceived, while the overall scale is reasonably consistent with adjacent homes to the north and south and others in the area. Adequate setbacks at both levels, overall building height well below the limit for the site and perimeter landscaping further ensure a less than significant impact to the character of the neighborhood. Staff supports the finding.

E. Setback Modification:

Discussion

Land Use Element Policy 1.5.4 of the City's General Plan states:

Encourage non-conforming uses and buildings to be brought into compliance with City codes.

Depending on the extent of roof/floor area removal involved with a project and the possibility of said project qualifying as a new 'structure', review of existing non-conforming 1st-floor setbacks may be required, as is the case with the subject project. However, when absent a legitimate benefit to neighboring properties or remedy of a major code infraction from provision of compliant 1st-floor setbacks, staff views imposition of such a mandate as an unreasonable and unnecessary hardship.

Residence

As already mentioned, the project would retain a substandard side setback along the south side of the residence. This section of the structure provides a 6'-4" setback, above the 5-foot side setback requirement in place at the time of construction.

Setback remedy would require removal of the southerly 18" in this area, which would compromise plumbing facilities to be retained and incorporated into a guest bedroom. Beyond this, some compensatory mitigation is proposed. The project proposes to reduce the magnitude of the encroachment by converting the westerly 14 feet of the

structure into a new open trellis. Lastly, the location of the encroachment is to the rear of the residence, largely unseen from offsite, while the most proximate neighboring home exhibits an encroachment into the north side setback, common to the shared property line.

Given this, imposition of the 8-foot requirement could only be deemed necessary to garner a significant massing, use or view benefit. In the case of the project, requiring adjustments to the proposed setbacks is unnecessary considering the single-story profile and long-standing nature of the structure in question, the siting/encroachment of the adjacent home to the south and others in the area.

Pool House

The legal non-conforming pool house falls under the scope of the requested Setback Modification since the conversion of the pool house's roof to a trellis constitutes removal and qualifies the pool house as a 'new' structure as well, independent of the residence.

Similar to the residence, retention of a non-conforming 6-foot side setback is sought. Also similar is the 5-foot side setback requirement in place at the time of the pool house's permitted construction in 1982. Its location well to the rear of the lot and low height limits offsite view. As such, the modified structure is not anticipated to have adverse impacts. Given the inconsequence of the roof's conversion to a trellis, retention of the existing setback is also regarded as appropriate for the pool house.

Findings

- 1. The proposed project is compatible with existing development on the site, and is consistent with other development in the immediate vicinity.**

The existing setbacks at the 1st-floor level are longstanding, visually sufficient and consistent with development in the area. First and second-floor additions would comply with setback requirements. Staff supports the finding.

- 2. The Modification would not be a grant of special privilege that is inconsistent with the limits placed on other properties in the area and in the R-1 zone.**

The project maintains the single-family use of the property and would retain encroachments by existing legal non-conforming structures, as opposed to the creation of new encroachments. Comparable encroachments are presented by structures on other properties in the immediate area, including adjacent homes to the north and south. Staff supports the finding.

- 3. Strict application of the R-1 zoning standards results in practical difficulties or unnecessary hardships inconsistent with the general purpose of the R-1 zone regulations and standards.**

Increasing the 1st-floor side setbacks to the north and/or south would require partial demolition of existing interior area and impact existing plumbing facilities, and is overly restrictive since the project would not add to or intensify non-conforming area and a needed view or massing benefit is not apparent. Staff supports the finding.

- 4. The Modification will not be materially detrimental to the public health, safety or general welfare, or to the use, enjoyment or valuation of property located in the vicinity.**

Existing encroachments would not be intensified through the project, while the resulting external effect from the additions as proposed would not significantly impact the public health, safety or welfare. The finding can be supported.

- 5. The proposed project preserves the existing scale and character of the surrounding neighborhood and protects public views, and aesthetic and other property values in the neighborhood.**

Preservation of the existing side yard setbacks and respective encroachments would not yield a significant visual effect as seen from the street or impact public views since the non-conforming structures in question are to the rear of the residence, longstanding and reasonably consistent with the character of the area, where other 5-foot side setbacks are apparent. Staff can support the finding.

F. Variance:

Discussion

The City's zoning code states that semicircular driveways are prohibited on any lot with less than 100 feet of street frontage. The Variance would allow an existing semicircular driveway to be retained in conjunction with the 'new' residence. The project site has 75 feet of street frontage, 25 feet less than the 100-foot requirement. Although the lot is currently improved with a semicircular driveway, its legal non-conforming status would be lost since alteration and enlargement is proposed.

One of the intentions of prohibiting dual curb cuts and semicircular driveways on lots that are less than 100 feet wide is to improve the streetscape by preventing over paving of front yards. As proposed, the 15-foot width of the driveways and extension of the south lane to access to the new garage would increase the amount of front yard paving and seems somewhat contrary to this intent. However, provision of paved access from the street to the garage is obviously necessary and would be compensated by paving removal to the north. Visual mitigation would continue to be provided by an existing front yard fence and associated landscaping that would continue to partially buffer views of the central paving. Most importantly, the proposed hardscape ratio would remain below the 0.50 limit, 0.46 as confirmed by staff.



Address	Lot Frontage
4379 Chevy Chase Drive	75 feet
4387 Chevy Chase Drive	75 feet
4395 Chevy Chase Drive	67 feet
4403 Chevy Chase Drive	64 feet

A survey of the immediate vicinity shows that there are numerous properties in the neighborhood with street frontages that are less than 100 feet wide and have semicircular driveways, including the four adjacent lots to the north, shown above, and others to the south. Therefore, the request will not constitute a grant of special privilege inconsistent with the limitations upon other properties or adversely impact the prevailing street setting.

- This request shall not constitute a grant of special privilege of development or use which is inconsistent with the limitations upon other properties in the vicinity and zone in which the subject property is situated.**

The subject circular driveway is longstanding and sought for retention, rather than a new project component, and several other proximate properties with frontages less than 100 feet wide have dual curb-cuts and semicircular driveways. Staff supports the finding.

- Due to special circumstances applicable to the subject property, including size, shape, topography, location, or surroundings, the subject property is deprived of the privileges enjoyed by other properties in the vicinity and under identical zone classifications.**

The subject driveway was developed years ago and is sought for retention in conjunction with construction of a new residence. There are four other properties

adjacent to the north and several others in the area with dual curb-cuts and semicircular driveways, and frontages less than 100 feet wide. Thus, the Variance is deemed reasonable since the location of the project site justifies dual curb-cuts and a semicircular driveway for the purpose of continued flexibility in site ingress/egress, a privilege enjoyed by other lots in the vicinity. Staff can support this finding.

3. The granting of such Variance will not be contrary to the objectives of any part of the adopted General Plan.

Objective 1.5 of the Land Use Element is to “Ensure that new and rehabilitated development is compatible with the residential character of the City, the project’s surrounding uses, the circulation network, availability of public facilities, and existing development constraints. The dual curb-cut and semicircular driveway in question is longstanding and consistent with the immediate streetscape. Expansion as proposed will remain below the 0.50 front yard hardscape ratio and improve Fire Department access. Although Land Use Policy 1.5.4 references non-conforming buildings and uses being brought into compliance, there is no mandate for said action if exception is justifiable through the entitlement process, in this case, a Variance. Staff supports this finding.

4. The granting of such Variance will not be materially detrimental to the public welfare or injurious to other properties or improvements in the vicinity and zone in which the subject property is located.

Retention of the semicircular driveway will continue to maximize safety for both the property owners and on-coming vehicles traveling along Chevy Chase Drive, while increased width will allow improved site access for the Fire Department. Staff supports the finding.

5. The project preserves the existing scale and character of the surrounding neighborhood and protects public views and aesthetic values and other property values in the neighborhood.

The semicircular driveway has virtually no effect on the overall scale and appearance of the residence and is consistent with the prevailing development pattern in the area. Adequate landscaping is already in place and will be preserved as part of the project. Staff supports the finding.

10. Recommendation:

Based on the above discussion, staff believes that the project is appropriate for the site and area and would recommend that the Second Floor Review, Floor Area Review, Setback Modification and Variance requests **BE APPROVED**, subject to conditions listed in Exhibit “A”, attached to the draft resolution.

C: *Jay Johnson /1125 Foothill Blvd. / La Canada Flintridge, CA / 91011*
Harmeet Singh / 4377 Chevy Chase Drive / La Canada Flintridge, CA / 91011