

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION  
OF THE  
CITY OF LA CAÑADA FLINTRIDGE  
HELD JANUARY 8, 2008**

**I. CALL TO ORDER:**

Chairman Cahill called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**II. ROLL CALL:**

Present were Commissioners Davitt, Gelhaar, Hill and Mehranian, Senior Planner Buss, Planner Gjolme and Deputy City Attorney Vargas.

**III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Commissioner Gelhaar led the salute to the flag.

**IV. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**

Comments were not offered.

**V. REORDERING OF THE AGENDA**

There was no request to do so.

**VI. CONSENT CALENDAR**

**Minutes of November 13, 2007.**

M/S/C Gelhaar/Hill to approve the Consent Calendar. 4 Ayes; Mehranian abstaining.

**VII. PUBLIC HEARINGS:**

**A. Floor Area Review 06-28 (amendment); Chandler; 809 Valley Crest**

Planner Gjolme recalled that the Commission approved a project on this property which allowed a new, 7,025-sf, two story home and retention of several accessory structures which collectively resulted in 9,800-sf of floor area on this 45,00-sf lot.

The subject site is a deep through lot, with frontage on Valley Crest and extending to Angeles Crest Highway to the north, with a depth of nearly 600 ft. A Power Point presentation showed the existing single-story home sited upslope from the street.

Planner Gjolme advised that the former project was abandoned and has been considerably downsized. The applicants propose to maintain the single-story design and expand the house by 658-sf to the rear and construct a 576-sf, two-car, detached garage also at the rear, for a total floor/roofed area of 1,200-sf. The project represents a floor area reduction of nearly 2,100-sf.

Staff learned subsequent to preparation of the staff report that the applicant Might opt to change the entry by extending it to align with the front of the house. This would net an additional 60-70-sf and result in 7,750-sf of total floor area.

The site plan was depicted on Power Point. Planner Gjolme noted that the new garage's 10-ft side setback on the east side exceeds the Code requirement of 5 ft for detached garages at the rear. Overall height of 20 ft is less than the 32-ft-height originally proposed. Overall, staff determined that the character, appearance and style of the existing home would be retained, and recommended positive findings and approval of the amended project.

Responding to concerns expressed by Commissioner Gelhaar, Planner Gjolme advised that the former approval had not expired and was assigned to the subject property regardless of who owns the property.

Chairman Cahill opened the public hearing. Comments were not offered and the public hearing was closed.

Commissioner Mehranian commented on the lack of any massing impact, since the additions were to the rear. She supported the request.

The Commissioners agreed.

M/S/C Mehranian/Davitt to approve the requested amendment to Floor Area Review 06-28 as conditioned. Unanimous.

**B. Second Floor Review 07-53; Modification 07-58; Baydian; 5136 Redwillow Lane:**

Planner Gjolme reported the applicant's request to construct a 480-sf second floor, which would encroach 1-ft into the front setback and 14-ft into the required 20-ft north setback, measured from the interior edge of a driveway easement, which extends along the north side of the subject site. The easement provides access for 5138 Redwillow, which is east of the site. Because Code requires that any easement be eliminated from qualifying lot size; the subject lot is reduced to 8,600-sf, causing the north side encroachment. Otherwise, a compliant 20-ft setback would be provided from the north property line.

The 10,000-sf site is located on the east side of Redwillow Lane, east of Noren Street, in the R-1-10,000 Zone. Total requested floor/roofed area is 2,381-sf. , which falls within the allowed 3,100-sf for the adjusted lot area (8,600-sf).

The neighborhood's average front setback measures 25'. The project's front setback ranges from 24 ft to 31 ft (averaging 27 1/2-ft), as it follows the street's curvature. Importantly, the addition would align with the north end of the residence.

A Power Point presentation showed the footprint of existing house, demonstrating what staff believed to be a modestly scaled project and a negligible encroachment at the front, not visible from the street. The elevations showed the minimal size and scale of the addition.. The home's height would be increased to 23 ft -- below the 28 ft allowed, and the home would maintain a horizontal expression. Wood siding, shuttered windows are included on the material board.

Staff did not regard the project as an excessive addition and recommended positive findings.

The applicant was present to respond to questions, but did not have any comments at this point.

Chairman Cahill opened the public hearing.

Edward Stork, who lives on a flag lot northeast of the subject site, and whose home abuts 5138 Redwillow, was concerned that second-story windows facing his property would allow views into his pool area, due to an elevation difference between the properties. He requested clarity and confirmed that the windows related to a bathroom and stairwell.

Applicant Aram Baydian, assured Mr. Stork that any views he has are over rooflines; he was not aware of Mr. Stork's home.

Further comments were not offered, and the public hearing was closed.

Commissioner Davitt read the report, which outlined Staff's justification for waiving story poles. His site visit left him feeling there would be impacts to the property to the rear, but he could not be certain without story poles. The Modification was not a concern, but he wanted the certainty that only story poles would provide.

Commissioner Gelhaar agreed and pointed out that the plot plan did not show the relationship of the adjacent houses to the subject site. Any impacts resulting from the existing home's proximity to the property line would be clarified by construction of story poles. He also questioned whether the project meets the criteria of the Residential Guidelines.

Commissioner Hill commented that story poles are an important factor in enabling the Commissioners to make informed decisions; he asked that they be provided.

Commissioner Mehranian advised that the design and the Modification were not issues for her, but the proximity of the neighboring house was. She also felt that story poles were necessary.

Chairman Cahill commented that he could support the project as presented without story poles. While he agreed with Commissioner Gelhaar's comment regarding the design, he would not deny the project based on that criterion alone. The requested height at 23 ft was modest and he felt the project suits the site; however, it was clear that a majority of the Commissioners disagreed. He provided the applicant with options of requesting a vote at this time or request for a continuance. The applicant opted for a continuance.

M/S/C Gelhaar/Hill to continue Second Floor Review 07-53 and Modification 07-58 to January 29<sup>th</sup>. Unanimous.

## **VII. OTHER BUSINESS**

### **A. Tree Removal Permit 07-38; Miller; 1250 Descanso Drive:**

Planning Intern Ballestar reported the applicant's request to remove three sycamore trees, with trunk diameters of 19", 21" and 25", all located to the rear of her home. The applicant states that the trees are causing structural damage to her home.

Tree #1, 25" in trunk diameter, is 4 ft from the house foundation and 4 ft from the eave line.

Tree #2, 19" in trunk diameter, is 2 ft from the foundation and 1 ft from the eave.

Tree #3 is 21" in trunk diameter is 2 ½ ft from the foundation and 18: from the eave.

Staff has made multiple site visits. The trees are approximately 4 ft from the residence and appear to be healthy. Staff verified small cracks running along the base of the residence.

A Power Point presentation showed the site plan, including the residence and the subject trees. The applicant submitted an arborist report and the City retained a separate arborist; both recommend removal of the sycamores to preclude further damage to the residence. Root pruning is not an option as it would cause the trees to become unstable.

Property owner Lisa Miller reported her concerns of potential damage to her home from winds uprooting the trees. She pointed out the proximity of the trees and their heavy trunks to her home. She has 68 trees on her property and would accept a condition to replace the trees in question in another location on her lot.

There were no comments from the audience.

Commissioner Gelhaar commented that the arborist reports had not convinced him about the structural damage; he did not see evidence of such damage. He believed the City needed a structural engineer's report to verify the arborists' conclusions in order for him to support Finding 1. He also felt that the trees could be trimmed and lightened.

Commissioner Hill reported that he did not make a site visit. He reviewed photos of the cracks and took the arborists' conclusions at face value, since he is not qualified to make an assessment regarding structural damage. He commented on the lack of evidence before the Commission to make Finding 3 and stated that he could not make Findings 1 or 2.

Deputy City Attorney Vargas advised the Commissioners to weigh the facts and weigh the alternatives; they need only support one of the "or" criteria to allow removal. He confirmed for Commissioner Hill that the tree roots were included in Finding 1 --- "where the tree itself, its excess foliage or its limbs is interfering with a structure of building and there is no feasible alternative to mitigate the interference.:

Given that advice, Commissioner Hill stated that he could make Finding 1.

Commissioner Mehranian agreed that a structural report was needed on the alluded-to structural damage.

Commissioner Davitt stated that he could make Findings 1 and 3. He believed the trees pose a threat to the property and he did not believe a structural engineer's report was necessary. He observed that an arborist is qualified to determine whether a tree's root system poses a threat --- "that's what arborists do".

Chairman Cahill concurred and advised that he relied on the arborist reports to a great degree. The trees are very close to the house. He stated that the homeowner is obviously a person who appreciates trees, given the 68 trees on the property and he felt she had a legitimate reason to remove the trees in question.

M/S/C Davitt/Hill to approve Tree Removal Permit 07-28. 3 Ayes. Gelhaar and Mehranian dissenting.

## **IX. COMMENTS FROM STAFF**

Senior Planner Buss reported on the damage done from the 5" of rain that fell in the City from the last two storms.

He also announced that the next meeting would be held in 3 weeks, on January 29<sup>th</sup>.

**XI. COMMENTS FROM THE COMMISSIONERS**

Comments were not offered.

**XII. ADJOURNMENT**

M/S/C Davitt/Hill to adjourn at 6:50 p.m. Unanimous.

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Secretary to the Planning Commission