

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION  
OF THE  
CITY OF LA CAÑADA FLINTRIDGE  
HELD JANUARY 29, 2008**

**I. CALL TO ORDER:**

Vice Chair Gelhaar called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**II. ROLL CALL:**

Present were Commissioners Hill and Mehranian, Deputy City Attorney Vargas, Director of Community Development Stanley, Planners Clarke and Gjolme and Assistant Planners Lang and Parinas. Chairman Cahill was expected to arrive momentarily.

**III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Commissioner Gelhaar led the salute to the flag.

**IV. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**

Comments were not offered.

Chairman Cahill arrived at this point.

**V. REORDERING OF THE AGENDA**

Chairman Cahill advised of having received a request to hear item VIII-E first, and confirmed that was satisfactory to the Commissioners.

**VI. CONSENT CALENDAR**

**Minutes of December 11, 2007 and January 8, 2008** - approved unanimously.

**VIII. PUBLIC HEARING:**

**Heard out of order:**

**Hillside Development Permit 07-02, Floor Area Review 07-01, Second Floor Review 07-02, Large Garage Review 07-01; Bagramyan, 1419 Sugar Loaf Drive:**

Assistant Planner Parinas described the applicant's request to demolish a 2,540-sf, single-story home and replace it with a 5,451-sf, two-story home (including a 666-sf attached garage) on hillside property. Total floor/roofed area would be 5,451-sf. A 2,700-sf basement is also proposed, but is not included in floor area calculations, since it is below grade. Floor Area Review is required since the project exceeds 4,500-sf on a lot with less than 80 ft of street frontage. Large Garage Review is triggered because the garage width is 35% greater than the lot width at the property line.

The somewhat isolated site is located near the southern border of the City, near the terminus of Domal Lane, Starland Drive and Sugar Loaf Drive. It is 20,030-

sf in area in the R-1-20,000 zone. Site constraints include a downward slope on the east side and 4 oak trees at the perimeter of the house on a 23.86% average slope.

A Power Point presentation showed the site and elevations. The project would be 172-sf smaller than the largest home on the neighborhood survey, and 1,450-sf larger than the average house size on the survey. Though the project demonstrates compliant setbacks, Staff had concerns with its proximity to the downslope area – the residence would be 4 ½ ft from the downslope at its closest point. Staff retained an arborist at the applicant's expense, and is waiting for his report that will analyze whether the basement would affect the oaks. There is also a non-compliance issue with the angle plane.

A neighbor who resides downslope, submitted a letter requesting a continuance so that he could appear in person before the Commission. His concerns were view impacts, the proposed height, loss of privacy and he also questioned the boundary line at the top of the embankment as shown on the plans.

Staff recommended a continuance for redesign that includes shifting the house to the west and removal of a balcony on the east side.

Director Stanley advised that the arborist was requested to address any impacts that could occur to an oak if the house is shifted westerly. He advised of having met with the project architect, who is willing to redesign the second floor and possibly shift the house, depending on the arborist's findings, and remove windows that might affect the privacy of the neighbor residing down slope. At this time, Staff was requesting direction from the Commission.

Craig Stoddard, project architect, related that he was in the process of reworking the project and that he welcomed feedback from the Commission.

Commissioner Gelhaar stated that he walked the project site and drove around the neighborhood. He asked if the fence up the hill near the driveway would be removed.

Mr. Stoddard responded "not necessarily, a surveyor is checking the property line". Once the arborist report is available, he will be in a better position to know how far he can shift the house toward the uphill portion of the site. He is also considering rotating the building counter clockwise, so that a majority of the bulk is shifted towards the interior of the property.

Responding to another question from Commissioner Gelhaar, he advised that the first-floor plate height is 10 ft and the second floor is 8 ft, with a 3:12 roof pitch.

Commissioner Gelhaar requested that a condition be added requiring retention of all existing trees.

Commissioner Mehranian stated that the structure appeared massive to her and that it would be difficult to support as designed.

Commissioner Hill expressed concern with impacts to the downslope neighbor's property.

Chairman Cahill concurred and added that shifting the house back is 'key', as well as lowering it and providing articulation.

Director Stanley requested that the driveway and garage on the neighboring property be included on the site plan.

M/S/C Gelhaar/Hill to continue Hillside Development Permit 07-02, Floor Area Review 07-01, Second Floor Review 07-02 and Large Garage Review 07-01 to March 11. Unanimous.

## **VII. CONTINUED PUBLIC HEARING:**

### **A. Second Floor Review 07-53; Modification 07-58; Baydian; 5236 Redwillow Lane:**

Planner Gjolme reported that this item was before the Commission at the previous meeting and was continued, so that story poles could be erected to better demonstrate the size and scale of the project. There was also brief discussion with regard to the design.

Staff continued to recommend positive findings. The 484-sf new second-floor would be sited at the far north end of the home, maximizing separation from the adjacent property and the home to the east. The rear setback ranges from 47-ft to 54-ft, greatly exceeding the required rear and second-floor side setback requirements. There are no prominent windows on the east facade in deference to that adjacent neighbor. The second-story profile spans 30 ft as viewed from the easterly neighbor, who would maintain 75% of their view corridor, which Staff felt was acceptable.

Roof forms represent a Ranch design, using double gables along perpendicular axis so that the appearance from the front and rear is of a gable/hip roof. Muted earth tones and dark shutters will be consistent with the existing home. Planner Gjolme then analyzed the project with the City's Residential Design Guidelines and its four primary considerations: Neighborhood Compatibility, Site Development, Physical Design Components and Landscaping and displayed photos of the story poles.

Staff determined that the project was reasonable and modest in scale as viewed from the street. It's impact would be minimal and additional landscaping would not be required in Staff's estimation. Planner Gjolme noted that siting

the addition at the far north end of the home puts it adjacent to a wooded slope which provides a backdrop and visually absorbs the addition.

Chairman Cahill opened the public hearing. Since comments were not offered, the public hearing was closed.

Commissioner Mehranian stated that the massing is not significant as evidenced by the story poles. She concurred with Staff's recommendation.

The Commissioners concurred.

M/S/C Mehranian/Hill to approve Second Floor Review 07-53 and Modification 07-58 as conditioned. Unanimous.

**B. Second Floor Review 07-45; Modification 07-56; Havanessian/Gabrielian; 2245 San Gorgonio Road:**

Planner Clarke reported that this project was initially considered at the Commission's December 11<sup>th</sup> meeting and was continued due to concerns of massing, lack of neighborhood compatibility, scale and view impacts. The direction was to lower the height and massing and rethink the location of the balconies

Revised plans show a height reduction of 4 ft., which was accomplished by lowering the first floor plate height by 1 ft and by reducing the roof pitch from 7:12 to 5:12. The structure is now 25'-10" in height. The second floor area was reduced by 74-sf and a protruding rear balcony at the northeast corner of the second floor was eliminated.

A Power Point presentation showed the revised elevations, the story poles and the original version versus the revised plans.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Mehranian, Planner Clarke confirmed Staff's continuing concern with the potential of converting the flat roof area at the front of the second floor into additional balcony space.

Director Stanley observed that draft condition 17 addresses that concern or that the balcony be redesigned. A second floor rear balcony above the first floor has been retained.

Applicant Harouton Havanessian, related that immediately after purchasing his home in June 2007, he began working with Staff on a redesign. His reported that after Staff would not support his first submittal, he changed architects and a second submittal was reviewed by the Commission on December 11. The current project had been downsized yet again. Mr. Havanessian advised that the front balcony is not useable as the roofline had been lowered. Overall height at 25'-10" is nearly that of a single-story home.

Commissioner Gelhaar confirmed that the existing story poles represent the most current submittal.

Project architect Richard Diradourian, reiterated that the front balcony is no longer accessible, as the sliding door was changed-out to a window. Liveable space has been reduced to 3700-sf and another 400-sf for the garage. He stated that the house is significantly smaller than what is allowed by Code and noted the lack of any complaints from the neighbors.

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

Commissioner Gelhaar recalled that at the last meeting, his concerns included impacts on neighboring views. He reported of again having walked the back of the neighboring property, which is upslope, and he believed the project would significantly affect the views of that neighbor. He stated this was only the second or third time during his 7-year stint on the Commission where he concluded that this property cannot accommodate a second-story home." He could not make the findings to allow a second story on this house.

Commissioner Hill concurred and stated that he could not make Findings b or c. The Floor Area would be – by far – the highest in the neighborhood, as would be the square footage. Driving down the street it is apparent that the house would be too large for the lot. He recognized that it has been downsized, but regrettably, he could not make the required findings to support the project.

Commissioner Mehranian confirmed that Commissioner Gelhaar did not believe that a second story was possible on this lot without having a tremendous negative impact on views of the neighbor residing upslope. Commissioner Hill conceded that a second story would be a challenge, but he would not want to deny based on that premise at this time. She concurred with comments that including a second-story would be difficult and that the project appears overpowering; however, she preferred to give the architect the opportunity for a redesign.

Commissioner Gelhaar added that if the pad were significantly graded, it likely could accommodate a second floor that would not affect his neighbor's view.

Chairman Cahill allowed the project architect to address the Commission again.

Mr. Diradourian noted that the upslope neighbor has not filed any objections. There was no view of the upslope neighbor until his client removed overgrown landscaping. The existing home is 15-16-feet high and he believed the addition would appear as a single-story home from upslope, due to a 12-ft-high retaining wall on the neighbor's property.

Director Stanley interjected that it appeared the concerns dealt more with compliance with the City's Residential Guidelines. Staff pointed out that the neighborhood is predominantly single-story and includes Ranch style design elements. He inquired if the Commission felt the project's height was the problem or if a redesign was in order. He also pointed out that Second Floor Review finding #3 talks about protection or public, rather than private views.

Commissioner Hill stated that he was not prepared to say that he couldn't vote for a two-story home, but because this design doesn't fit the neighborhood, he could not make the necessary findings.

Chairman Cahill remarked that the neighbor upslope has more views than many of the other neighborhood homes, especially the two-story homes that are proximate to each other. He did not believe the Commission should protect someone who isn't asking for protection - no one in the neighborhood has complained about the lack of compatibility.

Commissioner Hill observed that the issue was with Find 2, which requires that the two-story design preserves the existing scale and character of the surrounding neighborhood.

Director Stanley suggested that a split level design, similar to what was employed at 2263 San Gorgonio might work on this lot.

Chairman Cahill offered the applicant a vote at this time or opting for a continuance. Two of the Commissions believe that a second-story is possible, one of the Commissioners is absent and while the project isn't required to be smaller, it should appear smaller.

Mr. Havanessian opted for a continuance.

M/S/C Hill/Mehranian to continue Second Floor review 07-45 and Modification 07-56. Unanimous.

## VIII. PUBLIC HEARINGS

### A. Second Floor Review 06-12; Shaheen; 2255 San Gorgonio Road:

This request was also considered on December 11<sup>th</sup> and is immediately adjacent to the previous project. The Commissioner continued the matter for redesign -- their concerns were similar to those raised by the former project --. Direction given was to present a house that is less imposing on this street of predominately single-story homes and that massing and height be addressed. The Commission also directed the applicant to work with his neighbors. Planner Clarke presented the revisions on Power Point. The second floor was relocated from the east to the west end and the overall height was reduced from 32' to 27'-3". The square footage, however, was increased by 165-sf, for a

total floor/roofed area of 4,768-sf. A new letter and photosimulations were submitted by a neighbor, who continued to oppose the second-story and who is concerned with the height of the first floor. Story poles were reworked to reflect the recent changes and photos of the neighbor's views of downtown Los Angeles were shown.

Commissioner Gelhaar confirmed that the first floor's plate height remained at 12 ft and he noted that the story poles do not show the ridgelines or the hipped roofline.

Mr. Shaheen acknowledged that the story poles do not show the hip line from the top of the ridge to the eave, but the ridgelines were complete. He advised that he did his best to accommodate his neighbor by lowering the second-floor height by nearly 5 ft. He recognized that he could lower the grade by 1 ft and lower the roof pitch by another foot. If he redesigned to a full single-story home, the house would be wider, which would also require an increase in the roof pitch. He related of sharing the revised plans with one of his neighbors, who was pleased that at least his views of downtown Los Angeles were preserved.

Commissioner Gelhaar commented that the configuration of the first floor was problematic for him; the 12-ft ceiling height could be lowered at least 2 ft as well as the roof pitch.

Mr. Shaheen stated he was willing to do that.

Chairman Cahill opened the public hearing.

Carlyn Parks, who lives on Castle Road, north and to the rear of the project site, stated that she was "not happy with the second-story as designed, as she would lose her distant views of Los Angeles and replace short distance views of trees, etc., to one looking at the rear of the applicant's home.

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

Commissioner Hill felt the redesign was a tremendous improvement. The applicant's willingness to lower the grade, the plate height and the roof pitch seemed to be a reasonable compromise, as it is impossible to stealth a project.

Commissioner Mehranian appreciated the applicant's offer to lower the overall height further

Commissioner Gelhaar and Chairman Cahill concurred.

M/S/C Mehranian/Hill to approve Second Floor Review with an added condition that the first-floor roofline be lowered an additional 3 ft, in whichever manner the applicant wishes to accomplish that. Unanimous.

**B. Minor Conditional Use Permit 427; PLM Properties; 954 Foothill Blvd.:**

Assistant Planner Parinas described the applicant's request to establish a travel agency within a tenant space previously occupied by a retail use. The 570-sf tenant space is the easternmost portion of the Totta Building at the southwest corner of Foothill and Bel Air Drive. Parking for the entire building is located to the rear, where 30 parking spaces are provided. It is located in the Mixed 2 Use Zone of the Downtown Village Specific Plan.

Parking for this request falls under the purview of the CPD Ordinance. The parking requirement for the 10,428-sf building is 53 spaces; it is deficient 23 parking spaces. However, Ms. Parinas noted that the Planning Commission had approved a parking variance for this building in November 2005. Staff determined that the project would not generate greater parking demand and would be a less intense use than retail.

Staff recommended project approval with a condition that the existing sign, which was installed without permits, be reviewed by the Design Commission.

Kevin Blanch, representing the business owner, was present to respond to any questions.

Chairman Cahill opened the public hearing. Since comments were not offered, the public hearing was closed.

Commissioner Mehranian commented that the size of the non-retail tenant space is insignificant in terms of the numerous surrounding pedestrian-oriented retail uses. She did not have concerns with the request.

The Commissioner concurred.

M/S/C Mehranian/Hill to approve Minor Conditional Use Permit 427 as conditioned. Unanimous.

**C. Second Floor Review 07-26; Sandoval; 4843 Burgoyne Lane:**

Planner Clarke reported the applicants' proposal to demolish a 2,047-sf (excluding the garage), single-story home. It would be replaced with a two-story residence and attached garage with total floor/roofed area of 2,916-sf. (including the 431-sf garage). A 1,284-sf basement is also proposed, which is exempt from floor area calculations.

The 8,100-sf irregularly-shaped parcel is located on the west side of Burgoyne Lane west of Kirst Street, in the R-1-7,500 Zone. The neighborhood is a mix of single and two-story homes and of varying parcel sizes. The project represents a house larger than the neighborhood average on a lot larger than the average, as noted on the chart provided in the staff report.

A Power Point presentation showed the elevations and roof plan. Planner Clarke noted that second-story windows on the west side face a single-story home, which is 5 ft higher in elevation. Existing mature vegetation on the property line provides screening.

The project's design includes elements of the Craftsman style with gable roofs, a covered porch, wood siding and wood framed windows and garage doors. Dormer encroachments will require sign-off by the neighbors and a condition requires an east side dormer to comply with the required angle plane. Planner Clarke then presented a 3-D Power Point submitted by the project architect.

Staff analyzed the project with the City's Residential Design Guidelines and found that the scale, massing and materials relate well to the site and are consistent with the Guidelines. Additionally, only the second-floor represents only 38% of the total square footage, which helps mitigate any bulk.

Staff recommended positive findings and project approval as designed.

Commissioner Gelhaar referred to the Staff report which referred to a "non-habitable basement". He confirmed that if a bedroom were ever added, a fire escape would be needed. He inquired what was needed to make the basement qualify as *habitable*.

Director Stanley responded that the Building Code would require light wells for light and emergency escape.

Project architect Juan Aceytuno provided a brief overview of his traditional American style design that includes an open porch, dormers, a variety of materials, including wood siding, stone and a composite roof material. The first floor footprint is smaller than the existing home's, the setbacks for both floors exceed requirements and the second floor is set back 6 ft on all sides. He wanted to give the home a visual presence while maintaining a sense of scale. Visual bulk is minimized by a 34-ft-wide second floor at the front, which steps back, a 9-ft-high first-floor plate with a 4:12 roof pitch. As it proceeds towards the second floor, the wall is exposed no more than 7 ft, followed by a 6:12 roof pitch. A hip roof and dormers that serve as bay windows and interior seating for upstairs bedrooms also help out visually. Mr. Aceytuno felt that these features combined with the generous setbacks and a large tree that frames the west side of the property, make for a compatible project.

Commissioner Gelhaar confirmed that the basement will require export of dirt.

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

Director Stanley reported that the architect definitely “did his homework”; he worked with Staff on the design and redesigning of the roof height.

Commissioner Gelhaar commented that the residence is beautiful and well designed. He reminded the applicant of the conditions to meet the angle plane and to submit a haul route plan to Public Works for the export. Because he felt that at some point, the basement would become habitable, he requested an additional condition that the basement include windows and a fire escape.

Deputy City Attorney Vargas confirmed that Commissioner Gelhaar preferred that all basements be considered as habitable space in terms of providing light wells and escape routes.

Director Stanley commented that often, a property owner wants basement space for storage only and though below grade, light wells could encroach into the setback area. Staff has struggled in those situations and questioned whether there is an encroachment if it is below grade ----for zoning purposes, Staff has handled such situations as a retaining wall below grade.

Commissioner Hill commented that this project demonstrates why simply looking at FAR and the size of a house doesn't tell the whole story, and noted that only one house in the area is larger than this project. As he continued through his packet, he realized that this house is so well designed, that it wouldn't be a problem. He stated it was obvious that the architect had studied the Design Guidelines; this project is a prime example of a larger home that fits into the neighborhood. He acknowledged Commissioner Gelhaar's point about future owners adding a bedroom in the basement - light wells and escape routes could prevent serious consequences.

Commissioner Mehranian was prepared to support the project but was wrestling with requiring light wells out of concern that the Commission would be encouraging the basement to be used as habitable space.

Chairman Cahill stated that the project was beautifully designed and fits the lot. Addressing light wells for the basement, he was not inclined to impose a condition until the Commission studies the issue. He asked the project architect to address that point.

Mr. Aceytuno felt that there might be an issue with how Staff interprets “lowest adjacent grade”. The plans show openings in the basement, and since the basement walls exceed setback requirements by several inches, there is an opportunity for a light well to project from the wall without encroaching into the required side yard. He welcomed having a few windows for light and ventilation.

Director Stanley advised that Staff looks to prevent someone from creating a patio below grade, which would create a low datum point. He cautioned the Commission that the findings to approve Second Floor Review do not apply to basements. He suggested adding a condition allowing light wells, rather than requiring them.

M/S/C Gelhaar/Mehranian to approve Second Floor Review 07-26 with an added condition allowing for light wells in the basement. Unanimous.

**D. Second-Floor Review 07-54 Sayre; 818 Old Landmark Lane:**

Assistant Planner Lang described the applicants' request to allow a 1,040-sf, first-floor addition above a new, 440-sf basement with exterior walls exposed above grade. Since the basement "day lights" and has exterior access, it creates a new low datum point and the proposed addition above is considered to be a 'second-floor'.

Old Landmark Lane is a private street that extends west from Commonwealth Avenue, north of Wiladonda Drive, in the R-1-10,000 zone. The irregularly shaped lot is 16,913-sf in area. If approved, total floor/roofed area would reach 3,566-sf.

Ms. Lang pointed out that the appearance of a single-story home would not change and the requested floor/roofed area is well below the 5,133-sf maximum allowed for the lot. The portion that qualifies as "second-floor" extends along the south facade. The home's interior would be rearranged and includes a family room with an outside deck facing east. Below the family room is where the basement, with interior and exterior access, would be created. A gable roof would replace the shed roof at the rear of the residence and match the existing roofline on the north side. Building height as measured from lowest grade would reach 22'-8", below the 32' allowed for the lot. While the project demonstrates compliant setbacks, work is not proposed at the northeast corner where there is an existing front yard encroachment. Signatures of neighbors supporting the project were included in the Commissioners' packets.

One protected California pepper tree located in the area of construction, was analyzed by an arborist retained by the City. The arborist found significant decay in the tree's upper limbs, which led to the applicant submitting a Tree Removal request, which is being processed. Staff's intends to approve the request with a recommendation that the applicant either plant a replacement tree or make a deposit into the City's Tree Fund.

Staff's determined that the project relates well to the site and would not be visible from Old Landmark Lane. The project was found to be consistent with the Residential Design Guidelines and positive findings and project approval were recommended.

Project designer Mark Hutchins reported that his clients are deeply attached to their 98-year-old home and instructed him not to significantly change the exterior of the home. His clients could have easily demolished the home, but that was not a consideration. The design accomplishes their goal to preserve the magnificent front lawn with the house facing the street as at always has.

Mr. Hutchins related that much of the home's interior is marginal, since it is in its original condition. A majority of the new construction will not be visible and would be screened by the garage or landscaping; three sides of home would not be disturbed. He intends to continue with the original materials, colors, trim, etc.

His design provides a full exterior staircase out of the basement, which triggered Second Floor Review, but someone could exit from two directions or through the windows.

Addressing the issue of basements just discussed, he suggested using bulkheads, which is a traditional way of accessing basements in New England. They are also found in the Midwest for safe harbor from tornadoes. He stated that bulkheads would not necessarily trigger the low datum point threshold because the bottom step of the bulkhead ends at the basement floor line. He related of being raised in a house with a basement that included bulkheads -- they are useful for hauling items in and out as well as providing emergency exits, since they are bolted from the interior.

Property owner John Sayre stated that he and his wife were pleased with the project and hoped it would be approved. The basement precludes the need of having to add a true second floor and the subject California pepper tree has had major limbs fall, so he is anxious to have it removed.

Commissioner Gelhaar commented that he would like to see a deed restriction, prohibiting removal of the interior stairway to preclude a future duplex situation where the basement area could be rented. He recalled a recent approval that included a similar situation.

Director Stanley stated that the difference with the project alluded to was the zoning, which did not allow ALQ. The subject lot allows an attached ALQ.

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

Commissioner Hill remarked that Old Landmark Lane is a beautiful street and the subject home is outstanding; he was pleased that it was being maintained and refurbished. He concurred with Staff's findings and conclusions.

Commissioner Mehranian expressed appreciation for the design approach.

Commissioner Gelhaar lauded the historical aspect of the house and stated it is a great project. He believed that a haul route is necessary for the export when the basement is dug.

Chairman Cahill concurred.

M/S/C Mehranian/Hill to approve Second Floor Review 07-54 with an added condition that a haul route be provided for review and approval to Public Works. Unanimous.

**IX. OTHER BUSINESS**

**A. Hillside review for spas**

Director Stanley referred to the recommendation presented by Staff to exempt the current approval process when spas are added within the footprint of an existing swimming pool. Over the counter plan check and permitting would continue to be required.

Commissioner Gelhaar asked that Staff check that any associated larger equipment meet setback requirements.

The Commissioners agreed that establishing such policy was reasonable.

**X. COMMENTS FROM THE COMMISSIONERS**

Commissioner Gelhaar requested a study session on basements. Given the improvements that they include, it is more likely that they will be habitable and therefore safety exits should be provided.

**XI. COMMENTS FROM THE DIRECTOR**

Director Stanley reported that the General Plan Advisory Committee recently met and discussed the goals from the Land Use Element.

He also provided an update on the La Cañada Town Center project; all permits have been issued for all the buildings.

Regarding the Flintridge Bookstore, the property owner of the adjacent Hill Street Café will not allow the Bookstore to remove the eucalyptus trees, whose roots would be impacted by the subterranean garage. Therefore, the garage will have to be pulled back, which will result in the loss of 2 parking spaces, so it will have to come back to the Commission for approval.

**XII. ADJOURNMENT**

M/S/C Hill/Mehranian to adjourn at 8:35 p.m. Unanimous.