

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION  
OF THE  
CITY OF LA CAÑADA FLINTRIDGE  
HELD FEBRUARY 10, 2004**

**I. CALL TO ORDER:**

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

**II. ROLL CALL:**

Present were Commissioners Davitt, Gelhaar, Mehranian and Levine, City Attorney Steres, Director of Community Development Stanley, Assistant Planner Gjolme and Planning Aide Shimazu.

**III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Commissioner Gelhaar led the salute to the flag.

**IV. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC:**

Comments were not offered.

**V. CONSENT CALENDAR:**

A. Resolution 04-13 denying HDP 01-36 (amendment); Floor Area Review 02-21; Gazmarian; 1874 Palm Terrace Court. M/S/C Gelhaar/Mehranian to adopt; 4-1. Davitt dissenting.

B. Review of vacation of public right-of-way and slope easement; Highland Drive M/S/C Levine/Gelhaar, finding that the proposed vacation conformse with the General Plan. Unanimous.

C. Minutes of January 27, 2004. The minutes were not submitted.

**VI. PUBLIC HEARINGS:**

A. **Hillside Development Permit 03-61; Yang; 835 St. Katherine Drive:** Assistant Planner Gjolme described the applicants' request to expand their two-story residence, located along the east side of St. Katherine Drive, east of Chevy Chase, in the R-1-20,000 zone. The down slope lot is irregular in shape and tangent to a northerly curve of St. Katherine Drive.

Both floors of the home would be expanded; total new floor area would be 1,433-sf. A 458-sf first floor expansion would meet Code except for the front, where a 22-ft setback would be provided, compared with the 45-ft requirement

for the lot. He noted that the project exceeds the existing 20-ft setback by 2 ft at the southwest corner of the house.

The 975-sf second floor addition would align with the expanded first floor and extend the second-floor depth 21 ft, retaining the garage's existing 20-ft front setback. A contemporary roof would reach a height of 24 ft. At the southeast corner of the property, a 264-sf recreation/storage area would match the 20-ft front setback provided by the garage and expanded second floor. While it's northeast corner would extend downslope, overall structure height reaches 13 ft, within the maximum allowed for detached accessory structures. Total FAR would reach 4,325-sf.

Existing deck to the east would be expanded. Assistant Planner Gjolme noted that the deck would not add new floor area since its underside clearance is less than 7'-6" from all points. New landscaping is proposed to blend the expanded deck with the hillside.

Staff determined that the typical concerns of building mass and view blockage were not raised by this project, given its downslope siting and its separation from all homes to the North, South and East. The project would extend living area along the most logical course to the front and side and though it presents encroachments, Staff identified obvious topographic constraints and any crowding effects would be mitigated by the grade difference between the street and building pad.

The neighbor to the west has expressed concern with the increase in second floor window area and a small exterior patio above the garage. He noted that additional landscape screening or eliminating this area might be appropriate to mitigate privacy impacts, though views from that area would be to the driveway and garage. Staff recommended submittal of a supplemental landscape plan that demonstrates screening the undersides of the decks.

Staff recommended positive findings and project approval as conditioned.

Project architect, Greg Powell, explained his clients' needs to rectify inherent problems with the floor plan. They wanted to expand the upstairs master bedroom and add interior and exterior architectural enhancements. He advised of having explored expanding to the north, but that option was rejected due to the 20% setback requirement and impacts to the neighbor. The second option of expanding to the east was not feasible due to the slope. He believed that as designed, the project would have the least impact and be the most harmonious with the neighborhood. He noted there are homes of

similar size and set back approximately 20 ft from the street. On the down slope, any impacts would be minimal.

Since the Commissioner did not have questions for Mr. Powell, Chairman Engler opened the public hearing.

Lee Bird, 845 St. Katherine, described the unique situation shared with the applicant in that they share a pad which he believes would be more appropriate for a single home. The entrances of both homes face each other and they share a driveway and at one point, there is less than 10 ft of separation. He opposed any expansion of what he believed was an existing variance.

Assistant Planner Gjolme clarified that the existing front setback is legal but substandard and non-conforming; it was not created through a variance or setback modification.

Mr. Bird stated that he supported the project with the exception of the 2<sup>nd</sup> story addition over the garage, which he felt would crowd the space coming down the driveway. Another concern was the increase in glass facing his home and the punch-out on the first-floor, and the patios, porches and trellises which he felt decreased the distance between the homes. **Otherwise, he supports it!** His preference was that the applicant explore other alternatives such as expanding to the rear and asked that the Commission do whatever possible to preserve privacy between the two homes.

Commissioner Mehranian confirmed that he had not spoken with the applicant regarding the project.

Commissioner Gelhaar commented that the glass facing Mr. Bird's home seemed to serve as a light source.

Mr. Bird stated that he was concerned with the overall addition of glass and noted that new second floor windows would look over his property. He supported eliminating the trellis off the garage, but was more concerned with the trellis over the front door, which extends beyond the eaves and has a deck above. Though the deck is not functional, it represented unnecessary mass from his home.

Assistant Planner Gjolme observed that Staff's recommendations include a code compliant 10-ft setback for the first-floor at the west property line, which addresses Mr. Bird's concern with the two entry trellises. The carport trellis is not under consideration. The plans indicated that the carport was existing and

since it would establish a greater encroachment than what was noticed to the public, it was not to be considered at this time. The grouping of 2<sup>nd</sup> floor windows are adjacent to volume space dedicated to the stairway.

Mr. Powell responded to comments. The large area of second story glass is for purposes of allowing light to enter and would not look down on Mr. Bird's property. He stated that Mr. Bird incorrectly read the plans, as the pop-out at living room does not further impinge on the setback. The second-story windows begin at approximately 7 ft off the floor and extend to the ceiling. He stated that it would be impossible to look out from them and their purpose was to allow light entry. He recognized the concerns of the covered entry over the garage; however, the intent was to provide protection from the garage to the front door. He believed it provided articulation and add architectural interest and would give Mr. Bird more attractive view.

Commissioner Levine confirmed that Mr. Powell was willing to use opaque glass over the front door and stated that he would need a condition added that a landscape plan be submitted before any permits are issued and that the Fire Department sign-off before "anything is done"; otherwise, the project must return to the Commission for review.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Mehranian, Mr. Powell acknowledged that the deck above the trellis could be modified.

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

Commissioner Davitt made a site visit and visited with the neighbor.- He supported use of opaque glass over the front entry or perhaps removing one level of glass from over the front entry - the view would be straight out, rather than out. He supported Staff's recommendation to eliminate the trellis over the garage and encouraged Mr. Powell to do all possible to lessen the impacts to the neighbor while being sensitive to his client's rights.

Commissioner Mehranian commented on the uniqueness of the site and proximity of the residences. Agreed with either reducing the amount of glass over the front entry or using opaque glass. Her issue was with the patio over the garage and she agreed with Commissioner Levine for some type of landscape scenario.

Commissioner Levine stated that he was looking for Fire Department sign-off before anything is done to preclude past problems, eliminate the patio over the garage and his viewpoint was that all glass over the entry must be opaque.

Commissioner Gelhaar concurred with Staff's recommendations, with his colleague's Fire Department sign-off and eliminating the deck over the garage. He further believed that the project should comply with the FAR standard. The glass over the front entry was not a concern, as any views would be to Mr. Bird's front yard, rather into his home or back yard.

Chairman Engler asked why the eastern portion that faces the hills and National Forest wasn't emphasized more. He inquired if the applicant was interested in a continuance for redesign, a landscape plan, sign-off from the Fire Department.

Director Stanley advised that the Fire Department would not review the plan until it has city approval. He suggested adding a condition that if the Fire Department modifies the plan that it return for Commission review.

Mr. Powell stated that his client would agree to remove the trellises from the south and west sides and was willing to obscure the bottom row of glass over the front entry. He pointed out that the only view would be out and over Mr. Bird's home.

Commissioner Levine reiterated the Chair's question and asked Mr. Powell if his client - willing for a redesign?

Mr. Powell responded that his clients would prefer an approval at this point. He stated that he was willing to eliminate the deck over garage and reduce the sliders to 3-4 ft-high window and create a low roof over that area.

Commissioner Mehranian asked that he respond to the Chair's query of why expansion was not proposed on the east side.

Mr. Powell responded that it would be impractical, would require grading and would contradict many provisions of the Hillside Ordinance.

M/S/C Levine/Gelhaar to approve as modified; eliminating the trellis over the patio, all windows to be opaque and subject to the Director's approval; Fire Department approval for the project including landscaping. Any modifications are to Commission review. 4 Ayes; Engler dissenting.

Chairman Engler advised the audience of the availability of an appeal to the City Council.

**B. Modification 04-12; Lafko; 5126 Alta Canyon Road:**

Assistant Planner Gjolme related the applicant's request to enclose an existing covered patio and to construct a cabaña at the southeast corner of the lot. The project site is a through lot, located near the southeast corner of Alta Canyon Boulevard and El Vago, in the R-1-20,000 Zone.

A third-level 8' x 7' patio would be converted to a new bathroom and would not add floor area since the patio is currently covered. This part of the home is setback 15 ft rather than the 20 ft requirement. Assistant Planner Gjolme noted that this component qualifies for Administrative review and would have a limited effect on the overall appearance of the residence. Staff believes that this component is consistent with the purpose of the modification process.

The 411-sf cabaña would be located near the southeast corner of the lot in proximity to a previously demolished structure - the raised concrete pad has been retained. The structure presents a 5-ft setback on the east side, where a 10 ft is the requirement and a 12 ft rear setback, rather than 15 ft.

Staff could justify the proposed 12-ft rear yard setback, as it would align with the pool and would be greater than the 4-ft setback currently provided by a detached garage. Additionally, there is a detached garage on the neighboring property to the south with an unusually high roofline and approximately 4 ft from the common property line. The structure's encroachment to the east was more difficult to support since minor interior reconfiguration and shifting the structure towards the pool could easily achieve a code compliant setback on that side. With that condition, staff recommended approval

Neil Smith, project architect, stated that he was willing to work with Staff and perhaps reconfigure the cabana's east setback, but emphasized the need for space around the pool area.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Levine, Mr. Smith offered to shift the cabana to provide an 8 ft setback and perhaps reverse the design.

Commissioner Levine inquired if Mr. Smith was seeking a continuance for redesign, since the public hasn't had an opportunity to review the alternative.

Responding to a question from Chairman Engler, Mr. Smith stated that if the cabaña met the required setback it would be 2-3 ft away from the pool; the proposed proportions correspond with the owner's needs and use.

Applicant, Bruce Lafko reported that he has owned his property for 20 years and that he was proposing to rebuild a 50-year-old structure with a tile roof

that was always that close to the property line. The only added element was an open trellis.

Commissioner Levine confirmed with Staff that the slab is still in place and that a permit for an accessory structure was on file for this address, with no indication of what the setbacks were.

Mr. Lafko distributed a reverse design that would be a code compliant 10 ft from east property line; the open trellis would be on the south side. The north side depicted the tile roof with an open trellis. He asked if the Commission found that to be acceptable.

Chairman Engler opened the public hearing. Comments were not offered from the audience and the public hearing was closed.

The Commissioners unanimously concurred that they preferred, and could support the reverse design.

M/S/C Gelhaar/Davitt to approve Modification 04-02, with a revised plan for the trellis and cabana as submitted. Unanimous.

**VII. COMMENTS FROM THE COMMISSIONERS**

There were not comments.

**VIII. COMMENTS FROM THE DIRECTOR:**

Director Stanley provided a brief update on the City Council's Study Session R-1 revisions.

**IX. ADJOURNMENT:**

M/S/C Mehranian/Davitt to adjourn at 7:10 p.m. Unanimous.

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Secretary to the Planning Commission