

CITY OF LA CAÑADA FLINTRIDGE

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF LA CANADA FLINTRIDGE HELD ON FEBRUARY 10, 2015

- I. **CALL TO ORDER** 6:05pm
- II. **ROLL:** Vice-Chair Jain; Commissioners Gunter (acting as Chair), McConnell and Smith. Absent: Chair Walker
- III. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**
- IV. **COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC:** None
- V. **REORDERING OF THE AGENDA:** None
- VI. **CONSENT CALENDAR**
 - A. **Minutes:** January 13, 2015: No quorum of Commissioners from that meeting was present
 - B. **Minutes:** January 27, 2015: Not provided
- VII. **CONTINUED PUBLIC HEARINGS:** None
- VIII. **PUBLIC HEARINGS**
 - A. **Second Floor Review 14-17
4812 Crown Avenue
Ghanati/Koeppen**

Request to construct a new two-story house comprising 2,871 square feet, exclusive of its basement which is exempt from floor area calculations.

Senior Planner Buss gives a presentation in accordance with the staff report.

Commissioner Smith TS asks about an approval condition to address the screening.

Director Stanley notes that the screening was discussed in the staff report but not included in the approval conditions. He further notes that the trees in front would probably have to be removed when the basement is excavated, and recommends a condition to replace the trees in front.

Commissioner Smith asks about the front setback. Senior Planner Buss explains the application of setback averaging.

Acting Chair Gunter states that two Commissioners received different drawings different dates, and that his plans didn't show the pool and the houses to the north and south. Commissioner McConnell states that his drawing shows setbacks different from Commissioner Jain's.

Acting Chair Gunter asks about a section showing the rear portion 20 inches below grade and on the site plan the front of the basement extending beyond the footprint of the house. He suggests that this could affect the front yard landscaping 50% rule, although the information received about the front yard is not complete enough to make that determination.

Commissioner Jain confirms with Director Stanley that the front of the house applies to the 50% rule at the front door.

Commissioner Smith asks how the Fire Department deals with the flammable substances below the habitable space. Director Stanley advises that the applicant has researched that, and that it will be addressed at the Building & Safety stage.

Acting Chair Gunter opens the public hearing.

Project Designer Jaehee Ghanati applicant explains what the owner is trying to accomplish.

Acting Chair Gunter asks how the yard area above the garage will be finished. Ms. Ghanati responds that it will be either paved or landscaped.

Commissioner Smith refers to the staff report recommendations for more façade articulation, and Ms. Ghanati responds that she is willing to change the design as recommended. Director Stanley advises that he and Consulting Architect/Planner Cantrell met with the owner on site and learned of his willingness to make changes.

Acting Chair Gunter closes the public hearing.

Senior Planner Buss advises of having spoken with the owner, who was unable to attend the hearing due to a death in the family.

Commissioner Smith recalls visiting the site and looking at other 2-story houses in the neighborhood. He notes that other homes graduated second-floor setbacks, and states that the changes proposed in the staff report are needed.

Commissioner Jain recalls visiting the site and discussing with the property owner the objective of storing cars in the basement, and ventilation and fire safety issues. Mr. Jain agrees with staff's recommendations on articulation, and suggests that the project be brought back to the Commission following redesign.

Commissioner McConnell shares concerns about the second floor massing too close to the front setback, and suggests a condition to keep the front yard tree or replace it with a sizable specimen.

Acting Chair Gunter recalls visiting the site and states agreement with staff recommendations. He further states concern about size of basement since it extends beyond the footprint of the house. He refers to it as a commercial structure and voices concern with neighborhood impacts.

Commissioner McConnell recommends that the next review include a landscape plan.

Commissioner Smith states the need for the landscape plan to confirm screening for privacy protection in backyards.

Ms. Ghanati states that two months will be needed to revise the drawings.

M/S/C Gunter/McConnell to continue the project to the date certain of April 14, 2015 for redesign. 4-0

**B. Second Floor Review 14-30 / Hillside Development Permit 14-27 /
Modification 14-20
2345 Conle Way
Ourdukehanian / Oganesyian**

Request to allow the expansion of the existing first and second floors. The first-floor additions total 1,219 sq. ft. (inclusive of 114 sq. ft. of under-balcony area) and the second-floor additions total 584 sq. ft. The first and second-floor additions on the north side of the residence would have compliant 13'-6" first floor and 20'-0" second-floor setbacks. The front and south additions would encroach 5'-6" and the new porch posts would encroach 10'-0" into the required 25'-0" front-yard setback. The south side addition also encroaches 2'-3" into the required 13'-6" first-floor side-yard setback and 8'-9" into the required 20'-0" second-floor side-yard setback. The front and south-side additions would not encroach any closer than the existing residence, but the new porch posts and balcony over the garage would constitute a new encroachment.

Assistant Planner Harris presents the project, explaining that parts are Director-level approvals, but these have been held in abeyance to be considered with the Planning Commission's review. She indicates improvements on the site from prior approvals. She explains all the elements of the proposal including window placements and treatments, roof changes, and front entrance changes. Staff has talked to the neighbors of the project. Staff reviewed the project in the field in the context of the adjacent houses on the cul-de-sac and can support the proposal.

Commissioner McConnell asks about the code restrictions on the height of the entry. Ms. Harris replies that the eave height is limited to three feet above the adjacent eave and the overall height no more than 12 feet unless approved through Second Floor Review. Commissioner Jain asks about the floor area under the prior Administrative approval; Ms. Harris replies that it was 5,088 square feet. Commissioner Smith confirms with Ms. Harris that the discussion of encroachments is limited to unpermitted work on the south side.

Commissioner McConnell asks why the Administrative Hearing Officer did not approve it. Acting Chair Gunter identifies himself as the hearing officer and recalls conflicts within the plans and the issue of entry height.

Acting Chair Gunter opens the Public Hearing.

Alex Oganesyian, applicant/owner, appreciates all the work that was done on the project. Explains about the contractor and the work that was done without permits. He thanks all for their efforts including the Commission. He notes that the house doesn't block views, and states that the front change enhances the look and the usability of the house. Mr. Oganesyian apologizes for the problems that this caused, stating that the columns at the front of the house were there when purchased. He states willingness to plant screening as necessary.

Acting Chair Gunter closes the Public Hearing.

Commissioner McConnell states the front presentation is similar to others in the area and is struggling with the entry. How the entry is treated. Because it is prominent, Mr. McConnell is unclear how to treat this and wants to hear from the others.

Commissioner Smith also recalls his site visit, and states his concern about the project size. He has struggled with the history of the house, concluding that the property owner is ultimately responsible for permits. He states concerns with the entry, and a preference for the original 5,088 sf scale. He recommends scaling it back closer to the slope factor guideline.

Commissioner Jain recalls his site visit and emphasizes the importance of obtaining permits before starting work. He notes other two story entrances on the cul-de-sac, in two instances at the same setback as the project. He states that the scale of the entry is the only issue, and he can make the findings for what was built aside from the additional floor area. He recommends redesigning to hold the floor area to 5,088 sf.

Acting Chair Gunter also recalls visiting the site and having been the original hearing officer. Mr. Gunter agrees with his fellow Commissioners. He notes that the front design is an example of what not to do, and that the findings cannot be made for the excess floor area. He also notes concern about the front setback.

Commissioner McConnell confirms the the Director did not approve the front design, but only the second floor and rear deck.

Acting Chair Gunter invites Commissioners' views on how to proceed, whether continuance or denial. Commissioners Jain and McConnell suggest a story pole requirement. Commissioner Smith asks about the existing work.

Acting Chair Gunter asks if the Commission should split the actions. Director Stanley answers negatively, since the Commission would be asking for redesign in any event.

Acting Chair Gunter states the desire for a redesign that would offset or mitigate some of the other problems, something closer to the single-family residential design guidelines. He further notes that the front entry should be addressed, along with height and front encroachment. He states that reducing the part that is not built yet could reduce the floor area.

Acting Chair Gunter reopens the public hearing. The Commission discusses continuance dates with the applicant, who states the belief that he can prepare a redesign for the March 24th meeting.

M/S/C McConnell/Jain to continue project review to the date certain of March 24, 2015. 4-0

C. **Second Floor Review 14-35/Modification 14-19**
4376 Beulah Drive
Mu

Request to allow a second floor addition comprising 552 square feet, and legalization of an existing accessory structure with a 10-inch encroachment into the required 5-foot south sideyard setback.

Acting Chair Gunter advises the the project will not be heard and will be readvertised. He opened and closed the public hearing, with no one present to speak.

M/S/C Gunter/Smith to continue the project to a date uncertain. 4-0

D. **Second Floor Review 14-39**
5318 Angeles Crest Highway
Stroben

Request to approve a 444-square-foot second floor addition.

Planner Gjolme presents the project, consisting of a new garage, bedroom, and bath, noting that

the focus of the request is the new bedroom above the garage, with a balcony and porch in the back. He notes that all code requirements would be met.

Commissioner Smith confirms that the retaining wall is to be modified.

Commissioner McConnell asks about access to the garage, which staff confirms as being functional within the flexible requirements of the single-family residential code.

Acting Chair Gunter opens the Public Hearing.

Owner Wes Stroben notes property ownership since 1999, stating that the second story is for the daughter. He notes that the retaining wall on the plans didn't go far enough and so the wall will be changed to accommodate access.

Architect Laura Serdar also notes that the wall plan will be adjusted.

Acting Chair Gunter closes the Public Hearing.

Commissioner McConnell states that the findings can be made.

Commissioner Jain recalls having visited the site and its lack of street visibility or view of the project to the neighbors. He states that it is viable and supportable at this location.

Commissioner Smith recalls having met with the owners. He notes the project's screening and lack of effect on neighbors. He concurs with the staff report that it is not towering, but would recommend retaining the dormers for appearance. He also notes that the branch trimming would apply only if required by the Fire Department. He supports the project.

Acting Chair Gunter recalls his site visit and states support for the findings and for requiring the dormers.

The Deputy City Attorney and Director confirm a nexus regarding the dormers.

M/S/C Gunter/Jain to approve the project with a condition requiring the dormers. 4-0

- E. **Second Floor Review 14-40 / Conditional Use Permit 508 / Setback Modification 14-24 / Director's Misc. Review 14-51 (height) / Tree Removal Permit 14-30**
721 Berkshire Avenue
Panossian

Request to allow construction of a 4,861 sq. ft. addition (inclusive of 1st and 2nd-floor area) to an existing 7,968 sq. ft. 2-story residence. Total floor area in excess of 10,000 sq. ft. requires a Conditional Use Permit (CUP). A Setback Modification is also requested since the addition and a reconstructed front porch would provide a 60'-3" front setback, below the 65-foot requirement for the lot. Director's Misc. Review (height) would allow 3'-6" of excess building height in relation to a new low datum point while a Tree Removal Permit is required to remove two oak trees.

Planner Gjolme describes the project including the status of some of the trees on the site that will be removed. He notes that the setbacks are well within the requirements, with the garage also set back adequately. The new wing will add a garage, a game room, and a kitchen as floor area exceeds 13,000 square feet, but the increased size is well within the sizes of the neighborhood.

He notes a gravel path acting as a demarcation line for the limits of the expansion.

He notes the modifications to the architecture, stating that the slope would drop to cause some elements to be considered second-floor. He notes that because of the topography the height would exceed 32 feet, with a Director's Height Modification accommodating the request. He notes that the Setback Modification is required for the exact replacement of the existing front porch, which because of its demolition ceases to qualify for a Director's Modification rather than the requested full Modification. Staff states that the Modification is supportable based on a lack of impact discernable from the street. Staff supports the project per findings and conditions in the staff report.

Commissioner McConnell asks if the findings on the Setback Modification for the adjacent project to the west were the same as used here. Mr. Gjolme answers affirmatively.

Acting Chair Gunter opens the Public Hearing.

Dave DeAngelis, project architect, states that it is an exciting project due to the chance for faithful stylistic transformation of earlier work. He advises that the owners have met with some of the neighbors and sent letters to others with no response. Mr. DeAngelis recalls approaching the project with the idea of a Director's approval but changes have elevated it to a Commission case. He stresses the importance of the project's gable design and modulation of the house, and of trying to preserve the oak tree in the back.

Commissioner Smith asks about the covered patio. Mr. DeAngelis answers that the Fire Department wants to send the project to Forestry and they could force changes due to their regulations, affecting whether it is a solid roof patio versus trellis.

Commissioner McConnell confirms the generous distance to the trees at the end of the addition to the west.

Acting Chair Gunter asks if the garage can be moved back. Mr. DeAngelis replies that the game room would become too small.

Armen Panossian, property owner, notes that the dominant reason for the porch encroachment is the design, not the size of the game room. He states that the hedge at the front of the property will hide the house, and that the property is large and suitable for the extended family and guests, an important consideration to the family. He notes that the four-car garage would keep cars off the street.

Alex Holmes of 4228 Beulah Drive protests the deterioration of the neighborhood due to the removal of oak trees. He states that this is the fourth mega-mansion on this street, but that the trees have not been an issue in the past. He questions the loss of two trees, stating that the protection of trees is beneficial to residents for many reasons, and once cut would require decades to return to maturity. He requests that the Commission respect the neighborhood and realize that the decisions have repercussions for decades.

Acting Chair Gunter explains the changes to the tree ordinance, which allows removal for cases such as this.

Acting Chair Gunter closes the Public Hearing.

Commissioner Smith notes the large property size, stating that the project fits well into the lot. He states that it is not a looming mass and is an improvement from what is there today. He

recalls the arborist report and his own observations of the trees showing disease, infestation, and declining health. He has no problem with the removal if replacements are made. He can make all findings and is not concerned about the front setback encroachment.

Commissioner Jain recalls his site visit, and states sharing Commissioner Smith's conclusions. He notes the small size of the project relative to the property, and states that the tree removal is appropriate due to infestation. He supports positive findings.

Commissioner McConnell recalls visiting the site and spending a significant amount of time analyzing the setback modification. He states disappointment that the original architecture was not recaptured, a travesty given the significance of original architect Paul Williams. He notes that shifting the house back would be detrimental to other trees. He states the desire to see story poles on such a large project, but that he can support the height, noting also that it is well below the floor area limits. He supports the project.

Acting Chair Gunter recalls visiting the site. He states that the project fits with the design guidelines. He agrees that the trees are declining and so removal is justified. He has struggled with the Setback Modification, stating replacing in-kind is not an issue, but the garage encroachment could have been avoided. He notes that the home would not disrupt the neighborhood, and that findings can be made.

M/S/C Jain/Smith to approve the project. 4-0 except for Setback Modification 3-1 (Gunter dissenting)

**F. Hillside Development Permit 14-43 / Second Floor Review 14-42
484 Berkshire Avenue
Johnson / 484 Berkshire Investments, LLC;**

Request approval of a new two-story house comprising 6,179 square feet exclusive of its 665-square-foot garage and 483 square feet of covered outdoor area.

Director Stanley presents the project and notes the size of the house and the size of the lot. He notes the topography of the site and the layout of the houses that surround it, stating that the setting is tree lined and rural in nature. The pad is 12-15 feet above the street, with a 15% slope to the garage.

Mr. Stanley notes that part of the front yard encroaches into the road right-of-way, reaching 11 feet at its deepest point.

Director Stanley displays the landscape plan and notes the retaining walls at the rear of the house. He states the Slope Factor Guideline at 0.8, noting that the project area exceeds that amount by 400 square feet. All setbacks are exceeded, and the height is code-compliant. With slopes isolating the house from its neighbors, there are no view blockages.

Mr. Stanley notes that it would be the largest house in the area, at 17.9% density. Staff had some concern viewing the story poles from the street, and realizing the minimal level of articulation relative to mass. Staff has no issues with the other elevations, just adding window depth and other minor suggestions. He notes that the rear retaining walls would be hidden by the house. Mr. Stanley also describes the front retaining walls as being too tall and close to the street, and that they should better reflect the natural terrain and curve of the street.

Director Stanley recommends adding oak trees to the front slope for reforestation and softening the street view of the house. He refers to the other draft condition, including the outdoor kitchen that should be ensured to meet Fire Department requirements.

Commissioner Jain states the importance of Condition 19, dealing with the need to ensure fire safety for the chimney.

Acting Chair Gunter questions the height as measured from the lowest datum around the perimeter of the house. He also notes that the setback but not the height of the fireplace is indicated.

The Commission confirms with staff that front setbacks were dimensioned from the edge of the roadway and not the property line beyond.

Acting Chair Gunter opens the Public Hearing.

Jay Johnson, project architect, the setting in isolation from other houses. He describes the design as a simple architectural statement, lacking gingerbread or other trim. He notes that staff had suggested recessed windows, which are to be incorporated. He notes the twenty-foot side setback at the covered patio, and the window recesses as shown on the floor plan. He also notes that garage is 4'-6" lower than the house.

Mr. Johnson mentions that draft Condition #18 (shifting the house east 6 feet) would cause hardship for pool area and size of outdoor terrace, stating that revised rear retaining wall corrects the issues. He notes that the fireplace will be gas, not wood, and that no oak trees are being removed. He describes the front retaining walls as designed to go with lines of the house. He leaves open for discussion with the landscape architect where the recommended oak trees would be placed in the front yard.

Commissioner McConnell confirms that the low datum point, shown as 109 on the plans.

Acting Chair Gunter confirms the lower elevation of the garage and asks about the landscape material in the front of the house. Mr. Johnson refers to the presence of the project landscape architect.

Commissioner Jain asks about a color board, which Mr. Johnson mentions is ready to present by the landscape architect.

Commissioner Smith asks about stone veneer, and Mr. Johnson responds that it would complicate the contemporary, clean and simple architecture being sought.

Roy Leisure, project landscape architect, notes that he sited the building as far from large oak as possible for insurance purposes. He also wanted to get the garage and parking out of the way, so it was moved to the west. He cites the H/2 factor in the grading regulations as leading to a dual retaining wall to the southwest of the house originally, but that he had gotten a determination that allowed a single, lower wall and eliminate the concerns that had led to staff's recommendation to shift the building east six feet.

He notes that the 3'-6" retaining wall height limit in the front is acceptable, allowing the survival of the edges and safe yard that were sought in front of the house.

Commissioner McConnell asks about the pool and paved area as to impact on the nearby oak.

Mr. Leisure states that the existing walls will be replaced but in a manner that protects trees.

Commissioner McConnell confirmed with Mr. Leisure the tree and wall locations along with spatial constraints in the rear yard.

Property owner Matt Szebelledy describes the site as lending itself to Italian/Mediterranean design. He recalls much discussion in trying to site the house, with discussion with staff causing some changes to

the design. Mr. Szebelledy shows PowerPoint slides of homes in the area, the story poles, the trees from the street, the street from the front yard, and his immediate neighbors. He states his objection to the Light Reflectance Value (LRV) limits recommended by staff for the wall and roof colors; he offers a comparison of LRV 76 in the shade (similar to that of the front elevation) versus LRV 50 in bright sunlight and that LRV 76 is darker.

Acting Chair Gunter asks why the Commission should approve over the floor area in excess of the Slope Factor Guideline. Mr. Szebelledy notes that the requirement was new to him, and that the reduced lot area resulting from the front lot line situation led to the excess.

Lawrence Spencer-Smith, neighbor at 511 Berkshire Avenue, states his support for the project. He expresses his desire for the front of the house to maintain the rural atmosphere, noting that this site is the only part of Berkshire that doesn't have trees. He requests that during construction, materials and contractors secure and rope off the storage parking area from traffic, protecting tires from nails and debris. He concludes that he can barely see the story poles from his property.

Project landscape architect Roy Leisure responds regarding trees in front of house, noting that two strawberry trees of 24"-box size will be planted in front. He notes that he is not opposed to oaks in the front to be added to the existing trees.

Acting Chair Gunter closes the Public Hearing.

Director Stanley notes that there will not be any fences on top of the front retaining walls, and that staff wanted the oaks to be on the front slope.

Commissioner Jain asks about the street in front of the house and its status and use.

Acting Chair Gunter states that it is a big lot and can support a big house. He states frustration with the quality of the plans submitted. On a hillside lot the Slope Factor Guideline is the guide and this project is over that figure with no reason explained. He notes that the project deserves better plans including details of windows and doors and other trim, and should follow the guidelines. He also endorses comments about the semi-rural nature of the area, and the use of a curved front wall to continue the street flow.

Commissioner McConnell notes that the house is well forward of the existing house and adds a second story. He expresses concern about Light Reflectance Values. He states that the strawberry tree may not fit this location. He states that the additional area over the Slope Factor Guideline is protruding in front and is too big, suggesting that perhaps a different format and not such upright massing would be better. He endorses redesign of the retaining walls and questions the impact of the driveway. Commissioner McConnell states his desire for the Director to exercise the off-site parking management. He also recommends rendering the trees in the front to show how they work from the street view.

Commissioner Jain recalls visiting the site and meeting with the owner and architect. He notes some inherent concerns because the house sits up on the street. He regards the height effect as excessive, recommending setting the second floor back without going into the slope. He states that four to six new oak trees up front rather than at the end of the project would be effective. He states that the floor area figure is increased by the patio but should be reconfigured and brought down. He notes the importance of the parking because of the commuters on the road, and recommends working with Public Works on parking during construction. He concludes that he is not concerned with the height of the rear retaining walls hidden by house.

Commissioner Smith states that the lot can support the size but that it must be redesigned and front massing addressed, because it is imposing. He states that the site is not invisible, and more thought

should be given to layout. He endorses the idea of curving the front retaining walls, and concludes by commenting that the lot is like a scar with the lack of trees in the front.

Acting Chair Gunter reopens the Public Hearing, and confirms with project architect Johnson that an April 14th meeting date would work for a continued hearing.

Acting Chair Gunter closes the Public Hearing.

M/S/C McConnell/Smith to continue the project to the date certain of April 14, 2015. 4-0

IX. OTHER BUSINESS: None

X. REPORT OF DIRECTOR'S REVIEWS: None

XI. COMMENTS FROM THE COMMISSIONERS:

Commissioner McConnell asks if the City can ban contractors that violate the law. Director Stanley replies that the City has an Unpermitted Subcommittee that is looking at this issue, and that any suggestions from Commission will be accepted. Mr. McConnell states that he wants to look at the entirety of a project when looking at Second Floor Reviews, and asks the Deputy City Attorney for guidance on doing that.

Commissioner McConnell notes the tree ordinance update recently at the City Council, and recalls direction from the City Council to look at Finding #5 and what may need to qualify to use.

Commissioner Smith asks about the limits of the Commission viewing illegal projects as if not there.

Acting Chair Gunter questions the ordinance with regard to the 30% limit to roof removal without qualifying the project as new construction, stating that the rule should be revised, perhaps with an expanded definition or a higher threshold. He also states concern about the unintended consequences of allowing basements not to be counted as floor area, and recommends that it should be investigated in the new code revisions.

XII. COMMENTS FROM THE DIRECTOR:

Director Stanley notes that the 2048 Lyans Drive appeal will return to the City Council at their next meeting. He also notes that the project at 3751 Normandy Drive has pulled permits for the retaining wall, which should be complete soon.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT M/S/C McConnell/Smith to adjourn meeting. 4-0 (10:17 p.m.)