

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION
OF THE CITY OF LA CANADA FLINTRIDGE
HELD ON MARCH 25, 2014**

- I. **CALL TO ORDER** The meeting was called to order at 6:05 p.m.
- II. **ROLL:** Present were Chairman Gunter, Commissioners Der Sarkissian, McConnell and Walker, Director Stanley, Deputy City Attorney Guerra, Senior Planner Buss, Planners Gjolme and Clarke, Assistant Planner Harris. Vice Chairman Jain was absent.
- III. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chairman Gunter.
- IV. **COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC:** There were no comments from the public.
- V. **REORDERING OF THE AGENDA:** The agenda was not reordered.
- VI. **CONSENT CALENDAR**
 - A. **Minutes:** April 23, 2013 Commissioner McConnell abstained.
 - B. **Minutes:** November 12, 2013 Commissioner Walker abstained.
 - C. **Minutes:** December 10, 2013 Commissioner Walker submitted a change to staff.
 - D. **Minutes:** January 14, 2014

Commissioner Der Sarkissian stated that he emailed his changes to staff.

M/S/C Gunter/Der Sarkissian to approve the Consent Calendar with the amendments as submitted. 4-0 Unanimous

VII. CONTINUED PUBLIC HEARINGS

- A. **Telecommunications Permit 13-03/Variance 13-07/Categorical Exemption; Verizon Wireless; 4515 Ocean View Boulevard:** Request to allow cellular telephone antennas to be mounted on the roof of an office building. The equipment cabinets would be located in the north sideyard setback abutting the building and below an existing retaining wall. The antennas would be mounted on the southeastern corner of the roof surrounded by an eight foot screen wall. Staff is recommending approval of a Categorical Exemption for this project. (Senior Planner Buss) [Continued from February 11, 2014] **[Applicant has requested an additional continuation of this item to April 22, 2014 for the Commission-requested redesign.]**

M/S/C Gunter/Walker to continue the item to April 22, 2014. 4-0 Unanimous.

- B. **Hillside Development Permit 13-43/Second Floor Review 13-18/Large Garage Review 13-01/Negative Declaration; La; 921 Monarch Drive:** Request to allow construction of a new two-story 4,915 sq. ft. residence, with a below grade cellar and related site work. A Large Garage Review is required because the project has a three-car garage greater in width than 35% of the front of the parcel. Staff is recommending approval of a Negative Declaration for this project. (Planner Clarke) [Continued from February 11, 2014]

Planner Clarke gave a presentation in accordance with the staff report. He outlined the changes since the last meeting. The driveway width was narrowed; the guest parking was relocated to the side; and a decrease in floor area among other changes.

Commissioner McConnell asked if it was the City's practice to allow proposed developments to remove protected oak trees

Planner Clarke replied yes, if necessary but they would need a tree removal permit. The trees on this property are not impacted by the increased setback proposal.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian asked Deputy Attorney Guerra if the increased height needs a separate review and if it is included in what they are considering tonight.

Deputy Attorney Guerra replied no. If the Commission chose the option which has the increased height the project would need a variance.

Director Stanley stated that they would need a variance or redesign the project to reduce the height – either way the project would have to come back to the Commission for review.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian asked if there was a landscape plan submitted with the redesign.

Planner Clarke replied that a revised landscape plan was not submitted - just the calculation that showed that the landscape area to the front would increase.

Chair Gunter asked what the average front setback for the lot is.

Planner Clarke replied 25'.

Commissioner McConnell asked what the height limit is for the lot.

Planner Clarke replied that the height limit is 28' for hillside properties but it could increase to 35' with the provision of stepped massing.

Craig Stoddard, the project architect stated that the neighbor's preference was to not move the house down the slope. A 30' front setback necessitated removal of trees and the increase in height above the 35' height limit. His preferred the 25' front setback as currently proposed.

Commissioner McConnell asked Mr. Stoddard why they didn't provide new elevations for the front and rear for the different versions.

Mr. Stoddard stated that they didn't like the 30' front setback version so they didn't provided the elevations for it.

Chair Gunter asked for clarification if the extra parking space only works on the 25' front setback version.

Commissioner McConnell stated that he dislikes the ultimatums that were presented. It shows lack of cooperation on the part of the property owner and designer. He felt that the current design was a huge impact to the neighbors and there has to be a way to design the project without jeopardizing views.

Commissioner Walker thought that the house was well designed for the shape of the lot. She stated that she could make the findings for the original design with the 22' front setback. She felt that the 25' front setback was the better option and could also make the findings that version. She was OK with the smaller driveway. Providing a 30' front setback would not look right in the neighborhood. The 25' front setback

version would save the trees. She didn't feel like the Commission was backed into a corner regarding the different versions.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian asked Mr. Stoddard if for the 30' front setback option they could reduce the plate heights or the change the slope of the roof to lower the roof height.

Mr. Stoddard stated that the garage ceiling height is already low and the roof pitch is only 3:12.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian asked why they are concerned with the 2 – 16' Oak trees. He liked the 30' front setback version because there are more opportunities for landscaping in the front yard. He was hoping for a solution to lower the house so that a variance is not needed and to have the 30' front setback. He was OK with the narrower driveway. He wanted to see more landscape screening in the front.

Chair Gunter stated that he liked the 25' front setback and 20' wide driveway version. He felt that the decreased driveway width has a bigger impact on how the project looks rather than moving the house back 5'. He felt that the project met the provisions of the ordinance. He would like to see the landscape plan for the revised version.

Commissioner McConnell felt that this is a problem with the engineering of the driveway and how the project presents to the street. The driveway could curve down to the garage. He could not make the findings for any of the proposals.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian indicated that he could make the findings. He suggested leaving the review of the landscape plan to the Director of Community Development. He would like to see the addition of significant screening in the front yard.

Directory Stanley asked for clarification if Commissioner Der Sarkissian did not want to see the house from the street.

Chair Gunter clarified that the landscaping should be tall and dense rather than short and decorative.

Planner Clarke summarized the proposed landscape condition.

The Commissioners agreed to the proposed language regarding landscaping.

M/S/C Walker/Der Sarkissian to approve the project with the 25' front setback and adding Condition #30 regarding the landscape plan. 3-1. Commissioner McConnell no.

VIII. PUBLIC HEARINGS There were no public hearings

IX. OTHER BUSINESS:

- A. **Electronic Messaging Centers:** Discussion regarding a potential amendment to the City's Zoning Ordinance (*Zone Change 13-01*) pertaining to Section 11.37.040; Sign Regulations Standards and Guidelines. More specifically, the amendment would allow electronic reader-boards in excess of 4 sq. ft. on certain properties zoned Public/Semi-Public and Institutional with private school uses. This is a potential amendment to the City's Zoning Ordinance, which will require future Planning Commission and City Council public hearings (to be noticed later). The Planning Commission will make a recommendation to the City Council at this hearing. (Planner Gjolme) [Continued from March 11, 2014]

Planner Gjolme updated the Planning Commission with additional information and revised the draft development standards that were reviewed by the Design Commission. They revised some of the Design Commission's development standards because they were too rigid. He explained that staff decided to use similar standards to monument signs. He reported what the subcommittee decided which will be presented to the City Council. He explained that the subcommittee consisted of Commissioner Jain, two City Council members and one Design Commissioner. He showed eligible properties where electronic message signs would be permitted based on the recommended standards. Under the proposed standards recommended by the subcommittee only two properties would qualify - St. Francis and Flintridge Preparatory. These properties have a minimum of three acres and minimum enrollment of 400 students or more. He reported that the Design Commission was against a code change to allow electronic message centers.

Chair Gunter felt that it's time to move on. The Planning Commission needs to either agree or disagree with the proposed development standards. The location issue was addressed by the subcommittee. The Planning Commission should look at size, placement, form, materials, color and brightness.

Commissioner Walker also felt the need to move on from this issue. She has spoken with members of the City Council and community members. She felt strongly against allowing electronic messaging centers and that they aren't right for the community. The proposed lots that would qualify as outlined by staff are already in impacted areas and it could be dangerous. She was under the impression that an ordinance would be ready but she was told that it wasn't necessary at this time.

Commissioner McConnell appreciated the work that staff put into to developing the proposed standards. He was happy with all the changes as presented. He asked if limiting by the number of students is a legal criterion.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian said that he didn't agree with limiting signs using student population. He felt an electronic messaging center is not appropriate on St. Katherine for Sacred Heart since it is a residential street. He is OK with some of the locations that staff eliminated along Foothill Boulevard. He considers them the same as signs. He had some minor issues with some of the matrix items including the number of times sign copy can change. He suggested 4 times per day rather than 4 times per hour. Staff's suggestion is too frequent. He wanted to increase the distance that they could be allowed from residential uses.

Chair Gunter clarified that they are not going to address distancing issues. That would be handled by the subcommittee or the City Council.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian expressed concern over the reduction of the allowable distances from residential properties. He didn't think 50' was enough and would like to see it back at 100'.

Deputy Attorney Guerra reminded the Commission that they would not be discussing location of the signs tonight.

Commissioner McConnell added that a possible way to appease Commissioner Der Sarkissian's concerns is to give the Design Commission review authority on appropriate locations for these types of signs.

Planner Gjolme clarified that the Design Commission would have ultimate review authority on these types of signs.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian indicated that he did not have a problem with Foothill corridor locations but did have a problem with proximity to residential areas.

Chair Gunter felt that regulating the sign's location, brightness, size and duration of the imagery is appropriate. He felt that the 4 per hour is more appropriate than 4 per day. He felt that these types of signs are not any more distracting than externally lit signs at night. The message should not be revolving but can change. He added that it is not appropriate to indicate a black field since newer technology could blend better. He did some research and felt that we would want to measure the brightness of a sign in nits not lumens since lumens are hard to measure at night. They could consider different standards for daytime and nighttime. They could also add a curfew when the sign should be turned off. He reiterated that if the design standards are done correctly, these signs are not any more or any less distracting than a well-lit monument sign.

In addressing Commissioner Walker's concerns, Chair Gunter felt that if properly regulated, the signs could be done in a way that could be appropriate.

Commissioner Walker felt that staff did a good job in mitigating impacts of the signs but reiterated her feelings that these signs take away from the character of the town and that the signs won't improve the schools. She didn't see a need for these types of signs.

Chair Gunter asked if we need to outlaw digital billboards so that the three billboards we have don't go that way.

Planner Gjolme indicated that the existing billboards cannot be changed – only their content can change. He asked for clarification on the brightness numbers Chair Gunter gave.

Chair Gunter stated that the general nighttime range was 250-500 nits at night and 2,500-5,000 in the daytime; however, there is less concern in the daytime hours. As an example, an iPhone is approximately 300 nits.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian disagreed with Chair Gunter's increased frequency for the copy change.

Chair Gunter summarized that 3 commissioners are substantially comfortable with the standards as proposed by staff – with some revisions. One commissioner is opposed to the concept of having electronic messaging center signs at all.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian felt that the interval for copy change shall be no less than 15 minutes between images.

No public comments were offered.

Three Planning Commissioners were in favor of having electronic messaging centers with conditions and one is opposed to the concept.

- B. Planning Commission Goals and Objectives Discussion:** In preparation for the City Council's Goal Setting discussion, the Mayor has asked that each Commission discuss its own goals and objectives (if any) and provide input to the City Council.

Director Stanley stated that all of the Commissioners should have gotten a copy of the Planning Department Work Program. These are the Department's ideas but the Commission could include more. He gave the example that the Design Commission wanted more joint meetings with other Commissions and the Council.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian felt strongly that the Design and Planning Commission meetings should be televised.

Director Stanley explained that was suggested during their budget item requests to the Council. There is a cost associated with televising those meetings.

Chair Gunter suggested a more comprehensive communication plan for the City as a whole and not necessarily through cable TV since some people don't have cable. It should be put together by some who does that for a living.

Commissioner Walker agreed that public communication and awareness are important. For example, while they were discussing the Housing Element there was a lot of misinformation and once the residents were educated they weren't as concerned. There should be more consistent articles in the newspaper explaining what the City is doing.

Director Stanley summarized that the Planning Commission wanted a comprehensive communication plan prepared by a professional.

Commissioner Walker stated that it should be on the website. It changes the public's perception. It should be a priority.

Commissioner McConnell felt that electronic plan check should be a priority.

Director Stanley stated that everything is draft until the permit is issued.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian added that the plan check corrections should not be public.

Director Stanley stated applicants are required to submit in digital form now. Los Angeles County is looking at doing corrections on the screen.

Senior Planner Buss added that they are looking at an FTP server so that plans can be submitted digitally. Blue Beam is a company that has been used by the county in trial form.

Commissioner McConnell added that Accela and Infor are other vendors and their versions are online so an FTP server is not required.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian felt that the corrections should not be made public - just the final approval.

Senior Planner Buss stated that the City is in the process of creating a records retention policy.

Commissioner Walker asked if grading plans for all hillside development projects was implemented.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian reiterated that basements still need clarification.

Chair Gunter Council clarified that basements are not considered floor area.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian stated that his concern is how height is currently measured in relation to light wells.

Director Stanley stated that the Planning Department is consistent with regards to the light wells and how height is measured. We allow light wells per the building code.

Commissioner De Sarkissian respectfully disagreed that we are not consistent.

Director Stanley stated that maybe we need more clarification on light wells.

Chair Gunter reminded Director Stanley that the Planning Commission asked for surveys for all entitlements and a policy was enacted. Now we need a written policy about how height is measured in relation to light wells.

Director Stanley said staff can provide clarification on the topic.

Commissioner Walker asked if the tree valuation issue was ever resolved.

Deputy Attorney Guerra stated that there is now a Tree Replacement Value chart adopted by resolution of the City Council.

Commissioner Walker asked for an adopted tree ordinance review.

Director Stanley stated that Tree Ordinance will be brought the Planning Commission at their next meeting as a discussion item.

Assistant Planner Harris clarified that under the recently adopted ordinance, applicants can hire their own arborist to provide a report but that there is a provision that we can require a deposit to hire another arborist to review the submitted arborist report if necessary.

Director Stanley summarized the items that the Planning Commission wished to bring forward as discussion items to the City Council. 1 – A comprehensive communication plan, including televised meetings; and 2 – electronic plan checking for building and safety and planning applications. The other items were just suggestions to staff that could be implemented now. 1 – a written policy on light wells, 2- tree valuations; and 3 - requiring grading plans which is already in the hillside ordinance.

Chair Gunter clarified that there were a few times when grading permits were not submitted and the height of the house is close to the limit and a specific point of discussion.

Chair Gunter added that he would like to have coordination with the LA County Fire Department. Many projects they have reviewed are in heavily wooded areas. We should find out exactly what the Fire Department's requirements are. The Planning Commission is getting it second hand from the applicants. He wants the City Council to understand that it is very important.

Director Stanley stated that he reached out to the Fire Department and they wanted to know exactly what the Planning Commission wants to discuss.

Chair Gunter said it would help the Commission understand what the Fire Department's concerns are.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian added that he would like to discuss storm water issues but not as an issue for City Council. He would like to know how and when it is applied.

Director Stanley stated they can have a study session on storm water. It is a requirement that the City review projects for compliance but it only applies to projects if it disturbs a certain square footage of the lot.

Commissioner McConnell asked about view protection as it relates to the trees. He wanted to know what the Council's position on it was.

Director Stanley stated that they already had a discussion item on that topic and the Council did not want to create a view ordinance.

Director Stanley asked if there was consensus on coordination with the Fire Department.

Commissioner McConnell asked if the Fire Department's review can supersede the City's approval.

Chair Gunter clarified that the Fire Department has veto power but they can't approve something that the city doesn't approve of.

Director Stanley summarized the topics for discussion with the City Council

- 1) Comprehensive communication plan
- 2) Electronic plan checking
- 3) Coordination with Fire Department

X. REPORT OF DIRECTOR'S REVIEWS There were no reports of Director's Reviews.

XI. COMMENTS FROM THE COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner McConnell asked for clarification if the R-1 Tour was this Saturday and what time it started.

XII. COMMENTS FROM THE DIRECTOR

Director Stanley reminded the Planning Commission that the City Council has a goal setting meeting at 9 a.m. at Lanterman House on the same day. Lunch is at 12:15 a.m. and the tour starts at 1 p.m.

Chair Gunter stated that he will be out of town.

Director Stanley reported that there were two appeals received – 863 Berkshire Avenue and 2048 Lyans. He also reported that 458 Noren project was coming back for a revision.

He also reported that two Planning Commissioners were going to the League of California Cities Conference.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian reported that he had a conversation with a Councilman recently and they discussed the two historic houses that were recently demolished as part of reviews for new houses that were before the Planning Commission. He felt that there should be a list of historic homes.

Director Stanley stated that the City Council did not want a full Historic Preservation Ordinance. That is why they implemented the Mills Act process. The Council member that Commissioner Der Sarkissian spoke with should bring it up at a Council meeting for future items.

Director Stanley added that The City Council reviewed the Elissa project at 787 Greenridge and they agreed with the Planning Commission on the project with the exception of allowing a small addition on the first floor in the kitchen area.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT M/S/C Gunter/Walker to adjourn at 7:58 p.m. 4-0 Unanimous.