

**MINUTES OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION
OF THE CITY OF LA CAÑADA FLINTRIDGE
Tuesday, March 26, 2013
CITY HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS
1327 Foothill Boulevard**

- I. CALL TO ORDER:** The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m.
- II. ROLL:** Chairman Der Sarkissian, Vice Chairman Jain, Commissioners Curtis, Gunter and Walker: Commissioner Jain was absent. Commissioner Curtis was just elected to the City Council.
- III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Chairman Der Sarkissian led the Pledge of Allegiance.
- IV. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC:** There were no comments from the public.
- V. REORDERING OF THE AGENDA:**
- VI. CONSENT CALENDAR:**
 - A. Minutes:** February 26, 2013 M/S/C Walker/Gunter 3-0
- VII. CONTINUED PUBLIC HEARINGS**
 - A. Zone Change 12-03; City-Wide:** Consideration to amend the parking standards [Section 11.14.030.D. Parking] of the City's Zoning Ordinance. More specifically, the amendment would simplify the restaurant parking requirement to a flat ten spaces per one thousand square feet of floor area, reduce the number of parking spaces required for general commercial uses from five spaces per one thousand square feet to four spaces per one thousand square feet, establish a shared parking provision, and expand the parking adjustment process through the Conditional Use Permit. Staff is recommending that a Draft Negative Declaration be approved for this project. (Senior Planner Buss)

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

Commissioner Gunter had no comments.

Chair Der Sarkissian asked about Item 4 in the staff report - barrier free access.

Senior Planner Buss responded that it meant an unobstructed path between the parking and the building, and that it may also refer to handicapped access as the building code requires.

Chair Der Sarkissian stated that there are no new conditions above what the building code requires.

Director Stanley stated that it means access to the use from the designated parking spaces.

Commissioner Walker stated it was a good idea to make the parking standards city wide.

Chair Der Sarkissian had no additional comments.

M/S/C Gunter/Walker recommended approval of Zone Change 13-03 as submitted to the City Council. 3-0 Unanimous.

VIII. PUBLIC HEARINGS: None

IX. OTHER BUSINESS:

A. Discussion of Policy regarding light wells and entry steps.

Director Stanley discussed the code's definition of basement and light wells, when required. He also addressed how large light wells could increase building height by creating a new low datum point. He described the City's current policy of allowing light wells without additional review if their size was limited to the minimum allowed by Building and Safety. Since there have been requests for larger light wells, he wanted to get the Planning Commission's feedback on the issue. He asked if the Commission wished to be more lenient than the Department's current policy.

Senior Planner Buss clarified that staff is referring to light wells that are out of the setbacks.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian reiterated his concerns about light wells. He felt that additional limitations for light wells are important. Excess light wells are not the intent of the code. He didn't like the idea of creating a "moat" around the entire building. He felt that bedrooms are inappropriate in basements.

Director Stanley explained that there is a benefit to the property owner to include a basement in the project. It allows more square footage but it doesn't count towards the maximum allowed floor area. Although, the cost to dig out a basement could be costly. Currently, we keep light wells to the minimum allowed by the Building Code which requires light wells to project 3' from the opening and not extend 6" wider than the window. It also can only be 6" below the sill height and the window cannot be more than 44" above the floor level.

Commissioner Gunter stated that, in general, occupied subterranean living space reduces the bulk of the house which is in line with the zoning code. He is in favor of broadening the light wells and not using the Building & Safety minimum. We shouldn't get into the number of bedrooms. The allowance of light wells promotes putting bulk underground. We could limit light wells based on a percentage of the perimeter. That way it won't create a moat around the house. They should be controlled through a percentage of the length of the wall. The definition of two stories is a function of how much of the wall is exposed.

Director Stanley asked about how deep the wells could be and if stairs would be allowed in wells.

Commissioner Gunter said it is a function of the percentage of the size of the whole wall. He was okay with stairs on the outside and that we could use a reverse angle plane to determine

how deep a light well can be (eliminates patio-sized wells). For him it was a function of what's visible from the neighbor's house.

Director Stanley asked for clarification on how deep light wells could be within side setbacks, or front setbacks. Currently we would require a Setback Modification if the wall is deeper than 5'-6" within a required setback.

Senior Planner Buss indicated that the Fire Department would require some clearance within setbacks.

Commissioner Gunter stated the City should allow them and come up with numbers we can live with because it could minimize above ground bulk.

Chair Der Sarkissian felt having a basement doesn't limit the size of the house. People will still build to the maximum allowed above ground. He was against a front yard location for light wells. He would like side minimums, and be more generous on the rear. He added that stairs down in a well are okay in the rear.

Director Stanley explained that if light wells were larger in the rear we would have to count that as the low datum point and it could impact the height of the structure. It could also impact some of the other definitions in the code.

Commissioner Walker agreed that it is a good thing to put the bulk below ground. She is okay if the light wells are out of the setback with placement in sides or rear only. She is okay with larger light wells in the side yards as long as they are beyond the required setbacks.

Commissioner Gunter asked how close the projects are to the allowable floor area.

Director Stanley replied that many are at the maximum allowed.

Senior Planner Buss indicated that when we use the terms mass and bulk we are talking about what you can see above ground. He stated that in the case of Dr. Merritt, he took 800 sq. ft. out of the house as required by the City Council and added a basement to give him the same floor area without adding bulk. He also added that you could do a horizontal window that is at ground level which would eliminate the need for a light well. This would not, however, work for egress in an emergency.

Chair Der Sarkissian stated that he would be okay with larger light wells if the basement is used to decrease the above ground bulk of the house.

Commissioner Gunter clarified that adding a basement to a house doesn't necessarily make it smaller it just doesn't add bulk to it as long as it is buried. Adding reasonable light wells doesn't add to the bulk of the house. He added that if the Commission felt that the maximum allowed is too much then the ordinance needs to be changed. He added that a way to get additional space above the maximum allowed is to include a basement. He is okay with eliminating light wells in the front.

Chair Der Sarkissian summarized the sentiments of the Planning Commission 1) no light wells in front of the house; and 2) Light wells within the side yard setback requirement with limitations based on some formula.

Chair Der Sarkissian stated that the depth and width could be calculated.

Director Stanley offered to bring back alternatives and diagrams for the Commission to see.

Commissioner Gunter liked the idea of using a "reverse" angle plan since it is based on the location of the property line and/or using a percentage of the wall similar to other code standards in the zoning ordinance.

Senior Planner Buss reminded the Commission that there are other standards in the code that may dictate the location of the light wells. IE: mechanical equipment setbacks and fire department access.

Director Stanley suggested providing a minimum distance to satisfy those concerns and then apply an angle plane as suggested by Commissioner Gunter to determine the depth of the light well.

Senior Planner Buss asked if the Commission was referring to the line that is parallel to the wall or perpendicular to the wall.

Commissioner Gunter clarified that they are referring to the perpendicular wall.

Chair Der Sarkissian clarified that there should be a formula that deals with the surface size and a depth factor.

B. Planners' Web Subscription: <http://plannersweb.com/>

Senior Planner Buss explained that it is for Planning Commissioners and national planning issues are discussed. They could get 10 subscriptions for \$70. He asked the Commission if we should we add it to the budget. The consensus was to order it.

X. REPORT OF DIRECTOR'S REVIEWS: There were none.

XI. COMMENTS FROM THE COMMISSIONERS: There were none.

XII. COMMENTS FROM THE DIRECTOR: Director Stanley explained that the hours of operation for liquor stores discussion is going to the City Council and they may develop an ordinance. It would be city-wide and retroactive. He also noted that he prepared a twenty day notice for the call-up procedures zone change. It will be heard at the April 9th Planning Commission meeting.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 6:54 p.m.