

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION
OF THE
CITY OF LA CAÑADA FLINTRIDGE
HELD MARCH 28, 2006**

I. CALL TO ORDER:

Vice-Chair Davitt called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL:

Present were Commissioners Cahill, Engler and Mehranian, Deputy City Attorney Cobey, Senior Planner Buss, Planner Gjolme and Assistant Planner Lang. Director Stanley and Chairman Gelhaar were absent.

III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Commissioner Mehranian led the salute to the flag.

IV. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Comments were not offered.

V. REORDERING OF THE AGENDA

Vice-Chair Davitt pulled Item VIII, Tree Removal 05-54 and announced that the applicant had requested a continuance due to an unexpected meeting out of the country. After confirming that no one in the audience wished to speak on the matter, he asked for a vote.

M/S/C Cahill/Mehranian to continue TR 05-54 to April 11th. Unanimous.

VI. CONSENT CALENDAR

A. Minutes of 2/14/06 - M/S/C Mehranian/Engler to approve. Unanimous.

B. Minutes of 2/28/06 - M/S/C Mehranian/Engler to approve. Unanimous.

VII. PUBLIC HEARINGS

A. Hillside Development Permit 05-74; Witteman; 4285 Mesa Vista Dr.

Senior Planner Buss described the applicants' request to expand the first floor of their home by 216-sf and to construct a new second story of 775-sf. If approved, total floor/roofed area would reach 3,990-sf, well below the 5,414-sf allowed for the lot.

The subject site is located on the west side of Mesa Vista Drive, which accommodates 14 homes. It is a private street approximately 25-ft in width.

The applicants propose to expand the north side of the garage and create a workshop and create a master suite on the second floor. All setbacks and the 23-ft-height comply with Code. The project is compatible with the

neighborhood development pattern and at 18.4%, is well within the FAR range of surrounding lots. View preservation is not an issue; the closest home to the rear is at a higher elevation – views over the subject property will not be affected. Given the project's low profile and compatibility with the neighborhood, Staff recommended positive findings and project approval; the sole issue being the requirement for hillside homes to provide 2 additional, non-tandem parking spaces on site. The draft conditions require those spaces to be provided somewhere in the front yard, where there is ample room.

Commissioner Cahill asked if the Commission had the authority to waive the requirement for 2 extra parking spaces.

Mr. Buss replied it did, but only if the street was 36 ft in width or greater. Mesa Vista is 25-ft wide.

Applicant Terry Witteman advised that one space could be provided if a half course of brick were added to the driveway. Another space could be angled behind a crepe myrtle tree. She felt those 2 areas would be the least invasive and remarked on the irony of being forced to add paving to their front yard.

Project architect Franco Noravian presented a sketch to the Commission.

Vice-Chair Davitt opened the public hearing. Since comments were not offered, the public hearing was closed.

Commissioner Mehranian agreed with Staff's report that the proposal is not intrusive. She asked that the conditions include submittal of a landscape plan for review and approval of the Director, with assurance that the crepe myrtle is not affected.

Commissioner Cahill remarked that effectively requiring 6 parking spaces for this lot was overkill -- there are 2 spaces currently provided within the garage and 2 more in the driveway. He was willing to support a variance if the applicants chose that route; otherwise, he concurred with Commissioner Mehranian's comments.

Commissioner Engler questioned whether there was enough room on site for construction vehicles to park. He was willing to accept Mr. Noravian's sketch for the record, which showed 1 new parking space on each side of the driveway. He also questioned where more landscaping could be installed within what was becoming a confined front yard.

Vice-Chair Davitt felt the project was well designed and fits the site and its neighborhood. He agreed with Commissioner Cahill's remarks regarding the

onerous parking requirement, but if the applicants wanted to move ahead today, the Commission was prepared to do likewise.

Commissioner Cahill asked the applicant if they were comfortable with the requirement for 2 extra parking spaces.

Ms. Witteman asked if the private street and the easement they own could be considered as on-site parking area. If not, she further inquired if the easement area could be allowed for temporary parking, since they are not overusing the easement.

Deputy City Attorney Cobey stated that she would have to read their deed and the purpose for the easement, but she was doubtful that it applies to parking, unless specifically called-out.

Ms. Witteman quoted from the Hillside Ordinance that the extra parking applies to lots and building sites that are being developed; she considered her lot as already developed and questioned application of the requirement in this instance.

Commissioner Cahill stated that the applicant brought up good points. "Before a condition is imposed, we should be certain because that's an awful lot of parking we would be requiring in the front yard."

Responding to Ms. Witteman's comment that she did not want to delay the project, Vice-Chair Davitt noted the apparent consensus to approve the project now, but a variance would have to be heard by the Commission.

Commissioner Cahill commented on the possibility that a variance would not be required because the requirement might not apply. He suggested that approval be given including the requirement for 2 extra parking spaces, with the understanding that following consultation between the Deputy City Attorney and the Director of Community Development that the condition is not required, that the condition be waived.

Attorney Cobey advised that she would confer with Director Stanley and that he would contact the applicants.

Commissioner Cahill responded to a concern from Commissioner Mehranian regarding more landscaping

Senior Planner Buss stated that Staff would refer to code and past interpretations. If extra landscaping is required, turfblock could be considered.

M/S/C Cahill/Mehranian to approve HDP 05-74 with conditions as discussed. Unanimous.

B. Hillside Development Permit 06-07; Modification 06-04; Tran; 440 Georgian Road:

Planner Gjolme described the applicants' request to construct a new, 2,827-sf split-level, detached accessory structure on hillside property. The modification addresses a side yard encroachment by the second-floor and a retaining wall/fence combination that exceeds the maximum height allowed for such elements when located within side yards.

The project site is located on the south side of Georgian Road, between Woodleigh Lane and Chula Senda Lane. It is approximately 52,855-sf in area; 100' x 500".

The proposed structure would be located between the home and a barn and allow conversion of the existing garage into a library. The driveway would be extended along the west side of the proposed structure, leading to an auto court and a south-facing garage. This requires a 4-ft cut along the driveway extension and a 6½-ft-high retaining wall that would span 120 ft. It would exceed the maximum height for inward facing retaining walls by 1 ft. Atop the wall, the applicant proposes to construct a 9-ft-high fence, resulting in an overall height of 15½ ft from low grade.

The new structure is shown at 21 ft in height at the south side, exceeding the 15-ft standard for detached structures; however, 6 ft of additional height is allowed through the Administrative Height Modification, currently being processed. While the first floor provides a compliant side setback, the descending topography and a 12-ft high exterior wall present a two-story profile for the rear third of the structure, where a 10-ft setback is provided, below the required 20-ft setback. The westerly presentation is that of a single-story structure to that neighboring property, sited at a higher elevation.

A review of homes in the area revealed numerous homes in excess of 6,000-sf and several in excess of 10,000-sf. Though the project presents nearly 9,3000-sf of area, it would be distributed among the residence and 2 detached structures (all single-story), that would be viewed only minimally. Planner Gjolme noted that the entire property would be developed nearly 3,000-sf below the maximum allowed.

The single-story profile, low pad elevation and existing landscape screening make views from offsite unlikely. Staff's only concern was the 15-ft-high fence/wall combination. The draft conditions require that it be reduced to 6 ft in height measured from high grade on the adjacent property.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Mehranian, Planner Gjolme advised that the 3 ft of vertical cut would not require a significant amount of export. The City Engineer reviewed the plans and did not express a concern.

Project architect Richard Welsh, advised that the project would not be totally balanced, but any exportation would be done to the City's guidelines.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Cahill, Mr. Welsh stated he would try and preserve the existing bamboo hedge on the property line – his client and the neighbor are desirous that it be preserved. He was willing to discuss the fence materials with the neighbor.

Commissioner Cahill asked that the fence materials be the same on both sides.

Commissioner Mehranian confirmed that Mr. Welsh agreed to lower the fence height atop the retaining wall.

Vice-Chair Davitt invited public testimony and since comments were not offered, the public hearing was closed.

Commissioner Cahill agrees with Staff's finding that the project is appropriate for the site; it appears as single-story from the neighboring property and the grading would be reasonable. He asked that the conditions require duplicate material for both sides of the fence and that the fence be lowered to 6 ft.

Commissioner Mehranian concurred and noted that the bamboo hedge provides extensive screening.

Commissioner Engler asked that the applicant take all measures to protect the bamboo so that it isn't removed when the footings are poured. He did not believe a fence was necessary due to the thickness of the bamboo.

Vice-Chair Davitt concurred, adding that it was a well designed project on a very large lot, single-story in profile and screened.

M/S/C Cahill/Mehranian approving Hillside Development Permit 06-07 and Modification 06-04 with added conditions that the bamboo remain during and after construction, that the fence be lowered to 6 ft in height and that the fence of the same materials and appearance on both sides. Unanimous.

C. Building Depth Review 06-01; deFaria; 4400 Oakwood Avenue:

Assistant Planner Lang reported the applicants' proposal to expand both floors of their two-story home, adding just over 1,000-sf to the overall floor area. The project would result in a second-floor depth of 69'-3", exceeding the 60-ft threshold established for review.

The 34,120-sf site is located on the east side of Oakwood Avenue, at the northeast corner of its intersection with Georgian Road, in the R-1-20,000 zone. Total proposed floor/roofed area is 6,092-sf.

The expanded first-floor would project 12'-7" further back, while the second-floor, at a depth of 69'-3", would project 43'-6" beyond the existing second-floor building line. Depth exceeding the 60-ft threshold occurs primarily along the north facade where there is some landscaping screening on the north property line. Staff however, has some concern with bedroom windows located within the excess depth area and recommended that they be substituted for clerestory windows to minimize any impact to the neighboring property. Project height measures 25½-ft, compared with the home's existing height of 26½-ft and compliant setbacks are provided.

Staff determined that the size and depth of the second-floor is reasonable, considering the estate character of the site and the property's 200 feet+ of depth. Compliant setbacks, height, existing screening and modulation along the north facade mitigate any concerns of crowding on neighboring properties.

Staff recommended positive findings and project approval as conditioned.

Vice-Chair Davitt confirmed that additional screening was not proposed along what he considered to be the most critical area.

Alexandra deFaria was present to respond to any questions. With the exception of the Ajalats, neighbors did not have concerns with the project. She noted that some of Mr. Ajalat's concerns were addressed, the original roofline was lowered 8 inches and shortened the building depth by 2 ft and existing landscaping will eventually grow and screen the easterly and northerly ends.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Cahill, Ms. deFaria explained why design options proposed by her neighbor were not feasible.

Project architect Karen Zindler-Schuler advised that the gable bedroom window is not a problem for the neighbor and she confirmed the plate height for the clerestory windows.

Commissioner Engler stated he would be satisfied with a condition requiring a 72-inch sill height on the clerestory windows.

Vice-Chair Davitt opened the public hearing. Since comments were not offered, the public hearing was closed.

Commissioner Engler stated that he did not have concerns with the project so long as condition 12 was modified and 72-inch window sills provided.

Commissioner Cahill announced as a matter of disclosure that his company hired Mr. Ajalat's firm a few months ago. He reported this to the Deputy City Attorney, who advised that he did not have to be recused from voting on this matter. Commissioner Cahill's impression noted that the purpose of Building Depth Review was to assure that one neighbor would not have direct views to another neighbor's home or property. Since the extra 9 ft align with the neighboring home, it causes less of an issue than in some cases. He also supported Commissioner Engler's suggested condition.

Commissioner Mehranian concurred.

Vice-Chair Davitt also agreed and commented that removing the extra 9 ft would not change the situation.

M/S/C Engler/Mehranian to approve Building Depth Review 06-01 as amended. Unanimous.

VIII. OTHER BUSINESS (Continued)

A. Appeal of the Director's denial re: Tree Removal Permit 05-33; Stassi; 313 Baptiste Way:

Assistant Planner Lang recalled that this matter was continued by the Commission with direction that Staff secure reports from an arborist and structural engineer to address the appellants' assertions that two sycamore trees located in the front yard, are damaging the home's structure and lifting the house. Experts were retained and both confirmed that the sycamore closest to the house is pushing the foundation, causing the foyer to lift and the front door to jam. Both recommended removal of that tree.

Based on the reports, Staff recommended sustaining the appeal with regard to the sycamore tree closest to the house and denying the appeal to remove the second sycamore.

Commissioner Engler commented that the second tree is very large and prone to losing heavy limbs during windstorms. He asked if consideration was given to allowing the applicant to trim that tree more that typically allowed.

Appellant Ron Stassi stated he was pleased to hear Commissioner Engler's concern. While the trees are trimmed annually, the Ordinance restricts removal of limbs over a certain size. He stated that the tree's heaviest limbs lean toward the neighboring home; he requested additional relief suggested by Commissioner Engler.

Commissioner Cahill supported Staff's findings to sustain the appeal and allow removal of one sycamore. He could support more severe trimming of the remaining tree if there is a need under the direction of the Director of Community Development.

Commissioner Engler stated that it should be done under the supervision of an arborist.

Commissioner Mehranian and Vice-Chair Davitt concurred.

M/S/C Mehranian/Cahill to allow removal of the sycamore most adjacent to the house, with possible extra trimming of the remaining sycamore for safety purposes under the supervision of an arborist. Unanimous.

B. Tree Removal 05-43; Sharma; 381 Meadow Grove Street:

Assistant Planner Lang reported the applicant's request to remove two Chinese elm trees located in the front yard of his property. One tree has a trunk diameter of 22 inches; the other, a multi-trunk tree, has a combined trunk diameter of 40 inches and is considered mature or scenic, requiring environmental review. A Negative Declaration was prepared for public review stating that significant environmental impacts would not result from removal of the tree, given the numerous mature trees on the property.

A City-retained arborist recommends removal of the trees because their canopies commingle with the canopy of an oak located 13-18 ft away and jeopardize its stability.

Though Staff could not make all the required Findings necessary to allow removal, Staff recommended approval based on the arborist's report and making findings 3 and 4.

Commissioner Engler suggested that the property owner simply trim the elm canopies away from the oak. He recommended securing a second opinion.

Commissioner Mehranian noted that the arborist's report was a recommendation; it was still subjective in her mind.

Commissioner Cahill felt that peer review by another arborist seemed reasonable and commented it was unfortunate that the applicant or his representative was not present.

M/S/C Mehranian/Engler to continue Tree Removal 05-43 pending a review and report of a second City-approved arborist that addresses saving all the trees by trimming the Chinese elms. Unanimous.

IX. COMMENTS FROM THE COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Cahill as that Staff investigate what appears to be a new, solid wood fence just east of the Tran house on Georgian Road

Commissioner Engler asked Staff to check the Corona/Highland house for compliance with landscape maintenance. The grass is dead and there are weeds and dirt everywhere.

Vice-Chair Davitt reported of having attended the Planners Institute and that he participated in many sessions, including eminent domain, legislative updates, parking issues in downtown areas, how to evaluate projects etc. He felt it was a worthwhile conference.

X. COMMENTS FROM STAFF

Senior Planner Buss advised that the developer of the La Cañada Properties project held a community forum at Descanso Gardens. The approximately 60-100 attendees had many questions; the project seemed generally well received.

He and Director Stanley met with the EIR consultant. He felt it was likely that the Planning Commission would hear the request in July.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

M/S/C Cahill/Engler to adjourn at 7:31 p.m. Unanimous.

Secretary to the Planning Commission