

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION
OF THE
CITY OF LA CAÑADA FLINTRIDGE
HELD APRIL 10, 2007**

I. CALL TO ORDER:

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

II. ROLL CALL:

Present were Commissioners Gelhaar, Hill and Mehranian, City Attorney Steres and Planners Clarke and Gjolme. Chairman Davitt and Director of Community Development Stanley reported earlier that they would not be attending this meeting.

III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Commissioner Hill led the salute to the flag.

IV. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Comments were not offered.

V. REORDERING OF THE AGENDA

Vice Chair Cahill confirmed that there was no need to re-order the agenda.

VI. CONSENT CALENDAR

Commissioner Gelhaar pulled item B from the Consent Calendar for discussion.

A. M/S/C Gelhaar/Hill to approve the minutes of March 27, 2007.
Unanimous.

C. M/S/C Gelhaar/Hill adopting Resolution 07-30 approving Final Parcel Map 0611659. 3 Ayes; Hill abstaining.

B. Commissioner Gelhaar asked for discussion on this item. Upon review, he preferred that Section 1, #1, read: The proposed project is *not* compatible with existing development..... and that finding #3 end after *regulations and standards*. He asked that the remaining statement be eliminated.

City Attorney Steres commented that Section 2 should not include conditions. M/S/C Gelhaar/Mehranian to adopt Resolution 07-29 as modified.

Unanimous.

VII. PUBLIC HEARINGS:

A. Hillside Development Permit 06-65; Modification 06-78; Chung; 3828 Keswick Road:

Planner Gjolme reported the request is subject to pre-November 1 Code Standards, therefore Second Floor Review are not under consideration. He described the applicant's request to expand both floors of his two-story home,

located on a hillside lot. The request is comprised of a 168-sf first floor addition on the east side and a 1,000-sf, two-story addition at the southwest corner. Total floor area, including an existing 673-sf guesthouse would reach 4,914-sf, within the 6,064-sf allowed on the lot and the standard as adjusted by the Slope Factor.

The 21,570-sf site is one of eight through lots with frontage on Keswick and Madison Roads in the R-1-20,000 Zone. It has more than 100 ft of frontage on both streets. Access is taken from Keswick Road where the lot descends from street level to the building pad, then continues its southerly fall to Madison Road, which is considered as the rear. It is a heavily wooded site with an average slope of 27%.

Neighborhood characteristics were shown on Power Point --- a fairly large two-story home to the east encroaches into the side setbacks at both levels, while the house to the west is distant and buffered by considerable wooded areas. The project would align with the existing second story component. The 168-sft first floor addition on the east side would provide a 10-ft setback, below the 13-ft requirement, but it is minor in nature and maintains the existing legal, non-conforming setback of the guesthouse.

Planner Gjolme noted that only the westernmost wing qualifies as two-story and the greater portion of the project would be at the rear of the home. The outcome would be a structure with an overall height of 22 ft and down-slope wall height of approximately 17 ft., well within hillside limits.

An aerial site photo was displayed on Power Point, showing the 170 ft of separation between the addition and the house to the west. Further, the considerable landscaping from Madison would result in a profile not much greater than what is currently seen.

Staff did not consider the project to be intrusive, given it's size and location and determined the proposed 10-ft east side setback as appropriate. Lastly, the neighbor to the east submitted a letter endorsing the project and the 10-ft setback.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Gelhaar, Planner Gjolme pointed out the ample on site parking area.

Vice Chair Cahill opened the public hearing. Comments were not offered and the public hearing was closed.

Commissioner Hill reported of having walked the site and that he did not have concerns with the request.

Commissioner Mehranian noted the importance of the site's wooded characteristics and that the two-story portion was limited to the west side.

Commissioner Gelhaar also walked the site and thought the project would fit in nicely.

Vice Chair Cahill concurred and thanked Planner Gjolme for the helpful presentation.

M/S/C Mehranian/Hill to approve Hillside Development Permit 06-65 and Modification 06-78 as conditioned. Unanimous.

B. Floor Area Review 06-28; Second Floor Review 06-06; Kilaghbian; 809 Valley Crest:

Planner Gjolme described the applicants' request to demolish an existing home and replace it with a 7,025-sf, two-story residence. A 1,300-sf basement is also proposed. Floor Area Review is required as total floor/roofed area would exceed 4,500-sf on a lot with less than 80 ft of frontage; the subject lot has 69 ft of street frontage. He noted the uniqueness of the lot, with formal frontage along Valley Crest and continuing 600 ft to the north, where it rises more than 40 ft and widens to more than 170 ft before narrowing to its 15-ft-wide frontage along Angeles Crest Highway.

The 45,380-sf through lot is located on the north side of Valley Crest in the R-1-20,000 Zone, with an average slope of 14.3%.

A 3-car garage along the east property line and attached to the residence by a breezeway, would be demolished; a legally constructed guesthouse, garage and storage area with zero setbacks, would remain along the west property line.

A Colonial Revival home would be centrally located on the pad, with wood siding, double-hung windows and verandas along the front and rear elevations. Verandas to the rear add 1,277-sf to the project and inflate the numbers somewhat (the front veranda is exempted from calculated floor area since it is oriented towards the street). In reality, a 5,600-sf, two-story home is proposed. Height along the perimeter would be 20 ft, increasing to 32 ft at the primary ridge of the hip roof. A major benefit of the project would be correction of setback deficiencies at both sides; the project presents compliant setbacks, achieved by demolishing the existing house. The new residence would be set 20 ft further back than the existing home to address the obvious change in vertical profile when a single-story structure is replaced by a two-story residence.

Neighboring homes to west and east are smaller, single-story structures. Staff presented an overlay estimate of the new home's vertical profile to ascertain how it would relate from the street and to the neighbors.

The existing curved driveway on the east side would be abandoned and landscaped, and replaced with a new, circular "drive" with a single curb cut along the west side.

Staff had a concern that the upslope nature of the pad would result in the house being more visible; the scale and compatibility preclude making the Second Floor Review findings and Staff recommended reducing the second-floor mass. At this point, Staff's recommendation was for a continuance. Planner Gjolme noted that this project was a good example of why story poles are necessary for non-hillside projects.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Mehranian, Planner Gjolme advised that since Staff knew the slope calculation would be close to 15%, it was verified by a summary of each contour, provided by an engineer, and strict application of our hillside formula was applied to arrive at the exact slope percentage.

Commissioner Gelhaar asked what Staff was looking for in a redesign, as he understood that the initial submitted plan was redesigned in response to Staff's suggestions.

Planner Gjolme responded that the initial plan showed vertical and horizontal alignment of both floors that lacked appropriate modulation. The difference between that plan and the one under review is the covered veranda on the front elevation, which is carried to the side. Staff felt that change achieved enough modulation to satisfy one of the Second Floor Review findings. There remains a question whether the project preserves the scale and character of the neighborhood; it is flanked by much smaller, single-story homes. He stated that Staff's direction to the applicant was to reduce the size of the second floor and provide more distinction between the floors --- currently there is almost equal mass transitioning from the first and second floor.

Kurt Bednar, project designer, presented plans that included the veranda and signatures of support from neighbors on each side and across the street from the project.

Mr. Bednar reported it was a pleasure to design and work with his clients and the Planning Department; he believed the home fits the lot and meets the City's requirements. Throughout the design phase, he was careful to come up with a project that would be acceptable to Planning. He pointed out that the design is not as traditional as he originally wanted since the veranda was added and that

his clients have resided in the on-site guest house anticipating start of construction. Changing the design at this point would be a hardship as plans have already been submitted and returned by Building & Safety for corrections. He believed that Planning Staff's chief concern was the extent that the second story would impact the neighbors - he felt it would have very little impact and he showed a photo of the existing home with the project superimposed atop. The footprint does not extend further into the sideyards and the second floor is nestled within the trees. A combination of the roof slope and the home's angled view from the street results in only the small dormers seen in profile against the skyline. Mr. Bednar emphasized the importance of being mindful that the house would be seen from the street in an angled line of sight. Absent the veranda, the design would be Colonial Revival in its purest form.

Commissioner Hill remarked that removal of the dormers would decrease the visual height of the structure.

Mr. Bednar did not believe his clients would object to removing them, given that the veranda has already compromised the design.

Vice Chairman Cahill stated that the project appears to be 15 ft above street elevation --- that, combined with the height of the house results in a project that appears to be 40 ft high from the street. He noted the significant amount of hardscape and asked if there was any objection to removing some and replacing it with more landscaping.

Mr. Bednar responded that the existing situation includes a large driveway and high retaining wall, that 'dives' into the driveway apron. His design is for a smaller driveway and much larger landscape buffer. There would be another 12 ft of landscape area between the street and existing driveway and more opportunity to plant trees. A level and less visible motor court would replace the angled driveway at the top.

Planner Gjolme validated Vice Chair Cahill's comments --- replacing a driveway with a circular driveway and motor court presents much more hardscape. He agreed that the upper portion would not be as visible, but he felt the new hardscape would be very visible, absent considerable grading. He added that the project does meet Code with regard to the 50% hardscape limit within the required front yard.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Gelhaar, Mr. Bednar advised that earth-tone concrete would be suitable for the driveway.

Commissioner Mehranian remarked that it was difficult for her to determine how the hardscape and house would be screened without benefit of a

landscape plan. She confirmed that for other than hillside projects, the Commission has the discretion of requiring a landscape plan.

Commissioner Hill commented that the project presents a beautiful house on a great lot; the problem is that it doesn't fit the neighborhood. He stated that it would be helpful to eliminate the dormers and asked to review the site plan. He suggested ways to soften the appearance of hardscape by loosening portions of the driveway so that it looks like the rest of the neighborhood.

Mr. Kilaghbian offered to narrow the driveway circumference per Staff's suggestion, or add more landscaping. He reiterated that his intention all along was that the view from the street, be "green", rather than of concrete. He did not believe the building pad would be seen from the street due to its elevation; the view would rather be of lush landscaping with the house behind. He offered to modify the landscaping and eliminate the dormers to get approval. In response to a question from Commissioner Hill, he conceded to eliminate the circular drive if necessary, but he did not believe it would be as imposing as some believe.

Mr. Bednar offered to reduce the size of the circular drive and noted that it provides a way to get cars off the street. He suggested that using turf block could assuage concerns.

Vice Chair Cahill added that he liked the dormers; perhaps they could be smaller and maintain the architectural integrity of the design.

Mr. Bednar advised that they are shown at a width of 3 ft; it would be better to eliminate them; they would be out of scale if much smaller.

Vice Chair Cahill opened the public hearing.

Farhad Motic, 5306 Angeles Crest Highway, whose home is above the subject site, reported that he lost a view when a home was built on Princess Anne Road. He estimated the difference in elevation between his home and the project and concluded that he would be looking at the project's roof from his second floor and lose his views of Pasadena.

Richard Asher, 5132 Green Crest Road, resides approximately 3 parcels downhill from the subject site. He was concerned with height as viewed from the street, though he appreciated that this house would be set back further, and preservation of the scale and character of the neighborhood, which is primarily single-story, particularly on the upper side of the street.

Mr. Bednar responded to comments and assured the neighbors that the project would not affect their views. Angeles Crest is approximately 100 ft higher in

elevation that the subject site. Further, the roof would be comprised of gray asphalt shingle that would blend in, opposed to the large Mediterranean house nearby on Princess Anne Road. The roof is a 4:12 pitch and a hip roof is used to emulate the hills and space around it.

Planner Gjolme acknowledged that the vertical difference between the two pads accommodates the entirety of the structure's height, and it would not be prominently viewed from the neighbor's property on Angeles Crest Highway.

Marti Motic, 5306 Angeles Crest, was concerned with what she termed as 'view creep' and she distributed photos of how her view has changed over time. While she felt the project is sufficiently low that it would not impact what's left of her view, she wanted assurance of the same.

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

Commissioner Mehranian felt the request represented an exposed project on an upslope lot. She could not support the circular drive and did not have a grasp of the retaining wall and how it would affect the landscaping. Even without the dormers, she was still uncomfortable with the plan.

Commissioner Hill stated that "uncomfortable" was the key word. While the lot and design are outstanding, after driving up and down the street on the weekend in an effort to image what the project would look like, he believed the design fits the lot, but not the neighborhood. It is not what you see in the neighborhood. He commented that removing the dormers and softening the circular drive might help.

Commissioner Gelhaar reported of having spent time with Mr. Bednar on site. Since he believed the staff report misrepresents the project somewhat, he asked Mr. Bednar to portray the existing house in front of the proposed second story, to better compare the massing and what would be viewed from the street. He believed Mr. Bednar accurately represented the project and that the nominal roof pitch and moving the house back presents minor additional massing. He agreed with Commissioners Hill and Mehranian regarding the circular drive and preferred that it be eliminated if it couldn't be hidden. Otherwise, he stated that he could make the required findings. Commissioner Gelhaar related that during a joint meeting with the City Council, it was made clear that the Council's intent is not to preclude two-story homes in single-story neighborhoods. Addressing concerns of view loss, he informed the audience that there is no requirement to "stealth" houses; the Commission generally considers major view loss, especially when a house across the street, and at the same elevation, would block views. He did not believe that was the case with this project. He stated that he could make all the findings and was prepared to

support the request with a condition that the dormers be removed and that the circular drive not be visible from the street, subject to the Director's approval. Vice Chair Cahill agreed with Commissioner Gelhaar; initially, the 32-ft-height alarmed him; however, it is a nicely designed stately house and it "fits" the lot, which can support this house. He noted the numerous two-story homes on the street and felt the neighborhood was in transition. The two things working against the project is the upslope nature of the lot and its narrow street frontage, which add to the appearance of massing. He noted that all the Commissioners had a concern with the circular drive in terms of visibility. He stated that he could support the project now if the circular drive were abandoned and landscaped. Otherwise, the Commission would want the opportunity to review a plan showing the circular drive in detail and how it would be landscaped.

After confirming that Commissioners Hall and Mehranian were willing to support the project with out the circular drive and dormers removed, Vice Chair Cahill presented the options to Mr. Kilaghbian.

Mr. Kilaghbian stated there was urgency to have the project proceed and opted for an approval at this time as noted.

M/S/C Gelhaar/Mehranian to approve Floor Area Review 06-28 and Second Floor Review 06-06 with added conditions requiring removal of the dormers and the circular driveway. Unanimous.

City Attorney Steres advised that a resolution would be presented at the next meeting and Commissioner Gelhaar advised the audience of their option to appeal the decision to the City Council.

C. Second Floor Review 0-15; Modification 06-108; Edgar; 1500 Descanso Drive:

Planner Clarke described the applicant's request to expand the first floor of his single-story home and construct a new, second floor. Total floor/roofed area would reach 4,041-sf (within the allowed 4,124-sf for the lot). Since the project requires demolition of the roof, a Modification is required to retain the 21'-4" non-conforming front setback and a non-conforming 5' north side yard setback.

The 12,280-sf subject site is located on the west side of Descanso Drive, immediately north of Descanso Gardens, where the neighborhood average lot size is 9,647-sf. It is located at the corner where Descanso changes from a north/south direction to east/west as it transitions into the Gardens. It has 134 ft of street frontage and tapers to 46 ft at the rear property line. The area was developed in the 50s and 60s and is designed with traditional single-story homes with hipped roofs.

A Power Point presentation depicted grade difference between the subject house and the one directly north, which is 3-ft higher. The project consists of a 530-sf addition to the first floor, a new 1,351-sf second floor and a new front porch that would provide a focal point for the front of the house. The new second floor is setback 18 ft from the neighbor to the north. Two windows face the neighboring single story home but since they are closet windows, loss of privacy would not be an issue. Planner Clarke noted however, that the draft conditions require the roof sections over the garage and the single-story component on the north side be changed from gable to hip roofs to ensure compatibility with adjacent architectural features. A balcony at the rear of the house is set back to ensure privacy for the neighbor to the north.

The existing garage, which would not be changed, is set back 21'-4" from the front property line, compared with the required 25 ft front setback. Additionally, there is the longstanding first-floor encroachment on the north side. Staff determined that the project was sensitively designed and would not be intrusive, given that the new second story is significantly smaller than the first floor and is adequately set back from property lines. Requiring compliant setbacks would be overly restrictive and would not significantly alter the situation. Staff recommended positive findings and approval with a condition that the gable roof be changed to a hip roof as previously noted.

Project designer Ed Webb, reported that he wanted the house to follow the contours of the land and attempted to "hunker" the second floor into the roof. He did not have a problem with a hip roof versus a gable roof; it was simply a design option. The verticality of the rear elevation was broken with the balcony and the fireplace, as well as the wrap-around porch.

Commissioner Gelhaar stated he was curious if the driveway, which has two exits -- one to the street and another which appears to access Descanso Gardens, is permissible.

Mr. Webb advised it is an existing condition that would not be altered. His clients use the second access as a parking pad for guests.

City Attorney Steres commented that it would only be an issue if the City had a requirement to install softscape. Absent that requirement, it is an issue between two property owners.

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

Commissioner Gelhaar agreed with Staff's findings and stated that he could approve the project with the roofline as submitted.

Commissioners Hill and Mehranian concurred.

Vice Chair Cahill remarked that he liked the design and did not feel strongly one way or another regarding the roofline.

Mr. Webb stated that he intentionally used a gable roof over the garage to counterbalance the opposite side; he was concerned that Staff's recommendation could make the second floor appear heavy.

M/S/C Mehranian/Gelhaar to approve Second Floor Review 06-15 and Modification 06-108 as submitted and to eliminate condition 16. Unanimous.

VIII. OTHER BUSINESS

There was no business to report.

IX. COMMENTS FROM THE COMMISSIONERS

Comments were not offered.

X. COMMENTS FROM STAFF

Planner Gjolme noted that Mr. Dale Boggs was in the audience, anticipating a positive response that would allow him to remove the roof of his home for an approved project without need for a Modification. A fallen tree damaged Mr. Boggs' home a few years ago, verified by submitted insurance reports for required roof repairs. Staff intended to allow the entire roof to be removed and replaced under an Administrative Modification.

The Commissioners agreed.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

M/S/C Hill/Gelhaar to adjourn at 8:03 p.m. Unanimous.

Secretary to the Planning Commission